

The THOUGHTLESS
THOUGHTS
of CARISABEL





Class PS 3505

Book A15 T5

Copyright N^o 1903

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

THE THOUGHTLESS THOUGHTS OF CARISABEL

BY

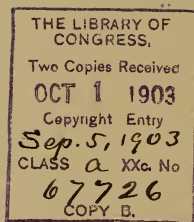
ISA CARRINGTON CABELL



NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1903



PS3505
A15T5
1903

COPYRIGHT, 1903,
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

Published September, 1903.

3000 2 1903
a.m.p., Nov. 21, 1932

To
S. L. W.
and
S. P. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE NEW MAN,	I
II. THE NEW CHILD,	17
III. THE TELL-TALE HOUSE,	27
IV. SERVANTS,	34
V. THE VISITED AND THE VISITOR,	46
VI. DINNER PARTIES,	59
VII. CONVERSATION,	67
VIII. MANNERISMS IN CONVERSATION,	80
IX. IGNORANCE IS BLISS,	88
X. THE MOTIVE OF TRAVEL,	96
XI. LOVE'S CATECHISM,	106
XII. SHOULD WOMEN PROPOSE,	117
XIII. DO MEN PROPOSE,	128
XIV. SHOULD MEN MARRY,	140
XV. LIKING VS. LOVE,	149
XVI. LOVE AND FORTY,	161
XVII. ONE'S OWN,	177
XVIII. ONE'S RELATIONS	188
XIX. FRIENDSHIP,	196
XX. ADVICE,	214
XXI. THE APOLOGY AND THE WOMAN WHO STOOD BETWEEN,	223
XXII. GRIEVANCES,	236

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. HAPPINESS,	243
XXIV. HOW BELINDA HAD THE GRIPPE,	258
XXV. THE CULT OF BEING BUSY,	268
XXVI. NERVOUS PROSTRATION,	275
XXVII. PERVADING PERSONALITIES,	289
XXVIII. THE NEW ETIQUETTE,	305
XXIX. ORIGINAL SIN,	318
XXX. DEFUNCT SINS,	327

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE author of this volume hurried off to Europe, without leaving a preface, and requested the publishers to inform the reader (for what purpose is not easy to imagine) that the book consists of "the unfashionable and passé opinions of a survivor of a past age," and to express her thanks for permission to print most of the articles, to the proprietors of the journal in which they originally appeared.

The few readers who in this age have enough time (and would it do to add seriousness?) to read prefatory matter of any kind, may wish, in addition, the usual explanation of the how and wherefore of the book. It was due, as many books are, to the instigation of the publisher. If the fortuitous turn of the sentence arouse a suggestion that many books are due to the instigation of somebody else, there is not to be any quarrel. It came about thus: The first of the two individuals just indicated, on a lazy Sunday morning in 1902, in a Maryland country house, was reading the *Baltimore Sun*—a paper of more than local reputation for giving people both what they want and what they ought to have—when he happened on an article signed "Carisabel," which was the first newspaper article that struck him

as worth booking since the never-to-be-forgotten day when he read for the first time one of Mr. Dooley's immortal papers on the Dreyfus case. He at once wrote to "Carisabel," as he wished he had done to Mr. Dooley. The lady responded with a very hesitating estimate of the merits of her work, and then the instigation became more active—with results now confidently submitted for the approval of the discriminating.

THE THOUGHTLESS THOUGHTS OF CARISABEL

I

The New Man

WHEN Jane and I drew straws as to which should marry and which should live with the other, and I got the short straw, there was great ado as to which of the passionately enamoured swains who spent the best part of their time prancing up and down on steeds with long flowing manes before our front gate, I should take.

At last after endless disputes we settled on John, and, I may as well confess, if we do not like him we have ourselves to thank: if our monster does not suit us, not he is to blame, but the artist.

“The ladies Eleanor and Isabel were sitting, with Miss Dale, all three at work on their embroideries; he (Sir Willoughby) had only to look at Miss Eleanor. She arose, she looked at Miss Isabel, and rattled her chatelaine to account for her departure. After a decent interval Miss Isabel glided out. Such was the perfect discipline of the household.”

I read, I rub my eyes; has Mr. Meredith with the

equipments of genius crossed continents and seas with winged feet, and, slipping behind the parlour curtains, viewed our own Willoughby standing in the attitude of majesty before his fireplace, while under his gaze sit Jane, and Dash, and I, in our accustomed yapping position, waiting for a sign?

And who, pray, is responsible for our attitude toward this large, unwieldy, unsmiling personage, with the best of hearts and the slowest of understanding—who seldom speaks except to ask “Where have you hidden the morning paper,” or “Is dinner ready?”—whose contribution to the remark that the moon is made of green cheese would be: “Improbable,” and to an explosion of the centre table lamp, which would send Jane and me flying out of the window, “Thus we see!”

As the Misses Eleanor and Isabel are responsible for the existence of the “Egoist,” so Jane and I are responsible for the Man about Our House. Neither of us is of the tribe of Judah, but we have been nourished in the rabbinical creed of the proper relation of the sexes. We had an idea, founded upon Old Testament history, that Providence had discriminated, and endowed man with certain qualities he had denied women, and that it was only decent and proper to enter the superior presence, veiled and with salaams.

Do you suppose when he first appeared on our stage, humble, shy, anxious to please, and much bewildered with the variety and brilliancy, if not

profundity, of our talents, John could have made of himself the Turkish pacha that he is? Did you know John, your answer would be prompt, and you would use that rare and precious word that so seldom issues from your lips or any lips. You would say "No."

Of a truth, but for a certain unalienable quality of common sense, inherited from a Puritan ancestor, and which the membership of two Women's clubs and a course of modern literature have not yet eradicated from my system, I should not have picked out John, but a fiery, passionate, reserved person, with whom to pass my days.

Though never admitting for an instant the degrading dictum of Owen Meredith's poem, "But then we women cannot change our lot," that picture of the young mother—her child upon her knee, "watching his light breath come and go, thinking of one, Heaven help and pity me, who loved me and whom I loved long ago"—did, in a way have its influence. I knew it would be useful as a dramatic setting. Had I not seen her again and again in the pages of romance, the throbbing, fiery, impulsive creature, chained to a clog? Had she not once come to me at night, in a long flowing teagown, and throwing herself at my feet, murmured, "If you only knew, but he—he—he would never, never understand——"

And yet that unalienable quality—common sense—told me that these were lies. It told me to take

John, and since to one of my temperament, imagination supplies the place of fact, I have fed my hungry heart by treating him as if he were a combination of Lord Byron and the Reverend Patrick Brontë, who, old-fashioned people who read biography will recollect, burned up the parlour rug when he became offended, and then "covered his wife's hand with hot tears."

Jane's requirements were simpler. But then Jane drew the long straw. But first she gave this sound piece of advice. She said, "Never tell him anything, and never ask his advice. When you do so, you put him in a false position. You endow him with a quality he never possessed, when you treat him as a reasonable being." As a brother-in-law, for Jane was afraid of robbers, all she asked was a large, able-bodied person who would inspire respect in a midnight marauder.

"And the only way to make robbers afraid of John," she remarked with sisterly candour, after a short but intimate acquaintance with his serene, good-natured attitude toward his race, "is to treat him as if we were afraid of him. Don't you recollect that Mrs. Bottome said that the way to be a King's daughter is to believe you are a King's daughter?"

This, I speak with frankness, we have done for twenty-five years, and now, though not possessed with what I should call quick intuitions, John has learned to allude to this domicile, to which he only

sustains a law relationship, as "my house"; he chooses the bedroom curtains, or rather signifies what he will not have; if the soup is cold, he makes a gesture of disgust; and once he threw out of the parlour window a little chair that broke under his weight. Among our minor discomforts is that of being compelled to choose the time when I convey unwelcome intelligence. If the plumbers must be called in, or cook is going, or the coal is out, I must seize the skirts of happy chance, and tell him so after he has eaten a satisfactory meal, or Jane takes it as a righteous punishment, because I was not provided with sops for an infuriated animal mentioned in the classics.

And on cold, dark mornings, when one's conscience is awake, and it is too early to get up and put it to sleep with matutinal coffee; when one is going over one's iniquities, and "making one's soul," one wonders did he take strict account, the recording angel, of the times and times when it has been necessary to invent clever speeches and tender speeches and wise speeches, and ascribe them to John,—John—who, wrapped in the garment of solemn and interesting reverie, is supposed to keep such revelations for the One.

"As John says,"—ah, familiar prelude!—and then follows the concentrated wisdom, the facile wit, the sensitive mind of the poet, the dreamer, the sage. The fact that he says nothing foolish is of itself pre-

sumptive evidence that, did he speak, his words were pregnant with wisdom. "Nobody," the writer has often affirmed, under the impression which she shares with the Bellman in the "Hunting of the Snark," that what you say three times is true,— "nobody really knows John but me." Verily, as saith the proverb, nothing is more misleading than fact. But I do not admit that those who dwell in the house of bondage have not their compensations. When I have been urged to perform an uncongenial task placed upon me by society or the demands of charity, I have more than once said: "I would gladly do it, but John will not let me," which humble and revealing phrase has softened toward me the heart of the soliciting committee itself, a heavy female of threatening mien. "John simply won't have them," has saved me from inviting relations to make our house their home when doing their fall shopping. And "You know John," has been even received with respect by my Aunt Sophia, a person in full possession of her faculties, and accustomed to be obeyed, and that with no silly talk about it.

Not that I would have you suppose me capable of always placing John for my own purposes in a disagreeable light. Scarcely does a day pass that someone does not compare him to the stout Colonel whom the heroine of Mrs. Burnett's "Through one Administration" found so inimical to her wedded bliss, and only yesterday I was congratulated on the

beautiful soul that I have asserted loudly is tucked away under his imposing exterior. But I would let fall a single dark hint.

The episode of the little chair cast out of the window in an outburst of unseemly, but not unprovoked rage (for its fate had been threatened), compels us to admit that there are the makings of a tyrant in every man; there is an incipient mogul in the tiniest Mr. Collins who ever bent his back in obsequious obedience to the orders of Lady Catherine De Bourgh.

But they are not of their own construction; vine-like characters, like Jane and me, are responsible for their existence.

Now, reader, I hope you will not take a prejudice against this book because it has begun with a personal confidence. Fear not that you are about to read an Amiel's "Journal," or a "Story of my Heart." I should not dream of introducing you to John, but that his record contains the germ of a greater problem. It describes how the New Man was evolved.

Thirty years ago, I am ready to affirm, there was no such person. The line between the sexes was drawn with so heavy a hand that the dullest never mistook a man for a woman, or a woman for a man. Those beardless youths who played the part of Juliet and Perdita, did they impose upon the rustic audience before whom they masqueraded? Was not

Rosalind but the more the woman for her doublet and hose, and the masculine qualities of George Sand and George Eliot the louder insisted upon because the ladies Marian Evans and Aurore Dupin had feigned a right to them?

Old-fashioned persons like Jane and me, with no thought of harm, and a frightful disregard for consequences, made the New Man, by making such people as John; and—such is the rapidity of growth of a malign influence—he has leaped from a pigmy into a giant. He who, if it had not been for us, would have been this moment sitting on his hands, fortified by the remark, “Why chairs? We are very comfortable as we are,” and drinking out of gourds, asserting between swallows, “Why glasses? I detest a fuss,” he, because we would have him other than he was, and would fashion our own deity, has come to matching curtains and choosing the parlour furniture. He has opinions as to the relative qualities of a Daghestan and a Bokhara rug, and knows that one must hang pictures on a line with the beholder’s eye.

And one of his most objectionable features is the tenacity with which he takes hold.

A man does not adopt a cult, he accepts it as if it were a blood relation. As he is a creature of habit, a change in him is a revolution. Having usurped our prerogatives, he has almost dispensed with our services. People complain of the New Woman, and

there is whimpering in the offices at Washington to the effect that she has all the clerkships, and the lawyers are in a state of mind lest she take their business, and doctors are legislating against her coming into the medical profession. But in justice's name, what can the poor thing do?

I myself have never seen the New Man engaged in darning stockings, though I have heard him repeatedly declare how perfectly he could execute the task if he only had time. But the gracious sight of him arranging the draperies has been vouchsafed me, and I have seen him shiver when discordant colours met his eye. I have heard him talk of houses as he would talk of people,—as anti-sympatica,—and, like the architect Pugin of the Bishop's cope, declare it hard to believe in the final salvation of a lady who wore artificial grapes in her hat.

And further, I have heard him giving directions about the length of the baby's stockings, and at his wife's table, inquiring whether the water had been boiled. I have seen him polishing old mahogany, and cleaning old brasses, and looking solemn when called in to decide whether a bit of embroidery was early Flemish or middle Spain.

As a housewife, oozing information, the New Man is not as agreeable as is to be expected.

The first requisite of happiness in the family is that the men go down town, quitting the house by 9.30, and not returning before 7 P. M.

Before the mischief-makers went to work, there were numberless wives whose habit it was to move from one quarter of the city to the other, their husbands receiving the first intimation of their change of residence by a note, left next door to the old address, telling them where to come for dinner.

But the New Man is a man of leisure. He does not go down town, and so he has ample opportunities to interest himself in matters "touching" him, as we say. The secret of the serenity of many a household of the past was in the phrase, "He will never know, for he will never notice."

I know one somewhat rare, but cherished specimen of fatherhood, who went so far as to ask a little boy whose features held something familiar: "And whose son are you, my man?" to receive the somewhat bewildering reply, "Yours, Sir."

This model of his sex left home so early and came back so late that he did not recognize the lad; his wife,—a good woman,—had showed the child his picture. But I don't suppose you could tell so pleasing an anecdote of a man or even move him, were he deaf, dumb, and paralytic, which is Jane's idea of a matrimonial prize, if he sat in the house all day, and could make signs indicating, "And what did you do that for?" You certainly couldn't sell his new overcoat to the old clo' man, or enter into an engagement with a book agent to supply you with a

pianola to be paid for in weekly instalments abstracted out of the market money.

The possession, then, of a husband who knows the difference between old Viennese and old Dresden china, having acquired his information by sitting in the house, may be a thing to brag about,—like a constitutional horror of cats, or an inability to digest strawberries,—but it has its disadvantages.

I should not want it to get about where any man were likely to hear it, but one of the reasons why we get married is to buy our own things, sell them, buy more, and move them about.

Jane and I know a New Man whose bridal present to his wife was a house completely furnished from garret to basement, and so perfect was the taste displayed that the most ingenious woman could not discover so much as a chair cover to find fault with.

Once she suggested that she introduce a work table of her own, about which associations clustered, into the morning room, but he made it perfectly plain that that particular work table would be the “jarring note.”

Now as my friend had married, like the rest of us, to attend auctions, either of her own or other people's things, you can fancy the blight that fell upon her when she entered this too, too perfect place. She was not lacking in a homely wit, and at first she

tried to fight the enemy with his own weapons. She said the house "lacked atmosphere," but it depends upon whose lips these impressive phrases issue from. He looked hurt, but not yielding; and though she had every disposition to drop a bottle of ink in the centre of the drawing-room, or let a gas jet do its will on a high-art frieze, she did neither, but detested the house.

When we saw her a year afterwards, she was making arrangements to spend the summer at her own rat-trap of a place in the country, where curtains of a grass green hung at the windows, and two large decalcomanie vases, the work of her own hands, were the parlour's chief ornament.

Now the waters of Jordan are no more popular to-day than they were when the sick king was bidden to bathe in them; but speaking with respect, I really believe that if people would take our advice, much that is objectionable in the New Man would be done away with. If, instead of his leading the idle life of an amateur collector of china or old silver or mahogany, he really made himself useful about the house, even we who are not too easily pleased would no longer regard him as a nuisance.

Nature, so badly perverted by custom, has really given man qualities that particularly fit him to excel in three occupations: those of cook, lady's maid, and nurse.

The qualifications of a good cook are a high

temper, an irritable disposition, strength of arm, a love of good eating, and a critical taste.

Long has woman served in this uncongenial employment. She who cares nothing for the viands she has spent her life in preparing has not obeyed a law of nature when she cooks, but a law of custom. That native fire and spirit which are the heritage of every man, if directed to a sauce or gravy, would make of the humblest kitchen the gourmet's paradise; that reticence which renders him, at the head of his table, a menace to good cheer, would go far in the kitchen to maintain that order and quiet which is the unfulfilled dream of the housewife.

The objection to the female cook is her followers, but the male cook would be subject to no such allurements; his apron would be fatal to romance, just as the brass buttons of the soldier inspire it.

And so the misfortune, as he terms it, of being forced by progressive and competent Woman—to uncongenial employments, will prove, as Emerson says, that "in proportion to the vigour of the individual, his revolutions are frequent. It is the order of nature to grow, and every soul is, by this intrinsic necessity, quitting his whole system of things, as the shell fish crawls out of his beautiful, but stony case."

And in the matter of nursing, there is no father who will not declare that he is formed by Providence for this task, and but for the old stumbling block

already referred to,—if only he had time,—his children would be perfectly brought up under his wise and beneficent care.

“He is never troublesome when I have him,”
“My dear, it is very strange that the baby always stops crying when I take him.” How familiar are these utterances. And what angels the little ones are Sunday afternoons, when he constitutes himself their guardian in a long, pleasant walk! If he prove so perfect a success in half an hour at night, and once a week from four till five, what would he not accomplish were they his entire charge?

No nerves about him, natural fairness, a cast-iron back, the legs of a centipede, fate herself has fitted him for the profession.

And for the third resource.—During the past year, men lady’s maids have proved the greatest possible success. In a recent number of a most expensive magazine, we read that at Newport the aristocracy, having once used them, will have no other; that they are, in a word, as necessary to the toilet as a black *crêpe de chine*. The matter of cleaning the silver that encumbers the dressing case is one that occupies him an hour a week, the shaking of skirts does not injure his cast-iron back, and as for the late ball, give him a half a dozen cigars and the butler to take a hand at euchre, and he will sit up all night in cheerful expectancy of his mistress’ return.

And one may feel such perfect security about one’s

things! Gloves, slippers, a hundred articles of the toilet, are as safe with him as a child in its mother's arms.

And his taste in dress! A female lady's maid can't help looking at the garment, but the male lady's maid looks at the woman who wears it. He regards it from the masculine standpoint, and when he is by to counsel her, she wears what is becoming, not what is the style. In consequence, when she sallies forth to the fête, if he has chosen her costume, the sex by whom she would be admired throngs about her. And the women are kinder than she has ever known them to be. "Poor thing," they murmur as she passes, "what a frightful gown," and are gentle to her charming face.

It really requires more magnanimity to forgive a surpassing toilet than a beautiful countenance.

So you see, even the man who does not go down town can make himself "felt," as we say, about the house. He may have luck, and marry a successful doctor, lawyer, merchant who will care for him and provide for him.

But he will find, should such fortune be his, that none of these accomplishments will make him the less valuable in the home to which he will take them.

And he must remember that marriage, while an adjunct, is not a necessity of happiness. Many a man has lived and died a cheerful, self-sustaining old bachelor. And at this time of our history, no true

mother will educate her son to think matrimony the end and aim of existence. Let her rather so bring him up that a son at her knee will learn to be modest, but independent.

And if no strong, brave woman offer him her deep, protecting love, why, he can find his peace in the congenial tasks recommended in these pages.

II

The New Child

THE other day I was talking with the mother of a spoiled, self-willed little girl,—a child not without her redeeming points, but upon whose infantile lips I fancy the words “won’t” and “shan’t” issued when one was so unfortunate as to hit upon a request repugnant to her. “Is Amy like you?” I asked in the old to-be-expected fashion.

If I had asked if she was like her great aunt Priscilla, who had a harelip, my friend could not have been more scandalised.

“Like me? No, indeed. I am thankful to say she is not in the least like me. I only wish I were like her.”

And, though this experience of maternal pride with self-deprecation would have satisfied the ambition of most people, I was not content till I tried again, and to another acquaintance put the natural and not-of-itself offensive question: “Is Gussie going to have your pretty taste for painting?” Dear, dear, what a business! this of knowing what to talk about. “Gussie,” said the mother, in quite a heat

of offended partisanship, "Gussie has decided talent, she is going to be an artist. She is not in the least like me, and certainly not like her father. She is the most conscientious, the most versatile——" The flood of Gussie's accomplishments and virtues descended upon me till I was engulfed. They left me sputtering, and her parents as bare as buried bones.

And then it came over a slow but patient intelligence that these remarks cast light on an individual hitherto little known to me, though the prescience of the calamity of his existence was certainly futured, as we say, by certain prophets. This individual is the Child. It must be confessed that I should have liked to make his acquaintance entirely through literature, as I have known Nero, Commodus, and other illustrious persons whose deeds have lighted the dull pages of history. But it was decreed that, as I am going out, he has come in, and our paths meet. For the rest of my life I see no way of avoiding The Child.

Now, in the very beginning, I must be plain with you and discuss this matter seriously, with dignity and solemnity, as an ethical preacher discusses our immortal part. We should speak of The Child, indeed, as we speak of the soul. The Child himself is in the pulpit, and has taken the place of the doctrines of free will and predestination.

In literature—here, I do joy in it, as we say—he

has come into our field, and Woman has slipped from under the microscope.

Now until my recent investigations I have always thought that parents cared for their children quite enough for all necessary purposes. They spoiled them and praised them and admired them till they were as disagreeable as the fondest mother's heart could wish. Two adjectives were consecrated to babyhood. If he was teething, we called him "splendid"; if past that stage, "magnificent." But in the new gospel, as taught by such thinkers as Professor Rowe of New Haven, "The Child is a wonderful being, and opens up to us problem after problem and enigma after enigma" (and here I condense), but the really important part of the subject is not what we think of him, but what he thinks of us. As to his physique, he is in a bad way. Madam, we dodge when we say it, Professor Rowe and the author, but through some fault of your own or your ancestors, your Child has imperfect eyesight, he hears indistinctly, his enunciation is defective. He has either epilepsy or hysteria. Wonderful as are his moral qualities, under which your fancied virtues shrivel up like a burning scroll, he takes his breath badly, and there is something wrong with the shape of his nose. No wonder the parents of Amy and Gussie repudiated any likeness between themselves and their offspring, if what Professor Rowe declares is true.

Now deep down in the inmost recesses of your mind, you may at times have thought your talented Tommy lazy, though you would have repudiated the notion as unjust had it been suggested by his papa. But from Professor Rowe you have learned that he is not lazy. The Child is never lazy. He was suffering from fatigue or nervousness, and you should discriminate between the two conditions, or you must pay the penalty. Rather than offend one of these little ones—why, of course you will pick up your book yourself. Fatigue, expressed when The Child is told to put away the wood or to go on an errand, “is the result of reduced nerve force and is deadening as far as the fulfilment of the tiresome task is concerned, but,” says this fair-minded educator, “it does not reduce necessarily the ability to put forth energy. Weariness, however, is psychological. It relates to the interests and the desires.” Therefore, when you make your Tommy go for his sister who is spending the evening out, though you do it at your moral peril, you may not have injured permanently his diseased body; but if he declares himself sleepy over his book, or complains that it does not interest him, you have sinned against the light, if you do not at once send him to the soda fountain to recuperate his “nerve waste” by a change of impressions.

The duties of a mother have never been particularly easy, even when The Child was “the children.”

They were subject to tiresome complaints, and stockings and trousers had a way of getting torn and soiled. To be sure, the limits of maternal pride are hard to reach. I have seen a young mamma blush and bridle and look as if she had discovered herself to be entitled to become a Daughter of the American Revolution, when she announced, "he has the most terrible temper, he nearly chokes himself to death in his rages." And my very nearest neighbour cannot mention her son without the proud tribute: "He really is the dirtiest boy I ever saw, mud every day up to his neck." But as the weight of a rose leaf to that of a chapter of Duruy's "Middle Ages," so is the burden of the mother of children to that of the mother of The Child. I read, or rather Jane read to me last week, that this unfortunate ought to have, along with the squills and the hot-water bag, the ergograph and the sphygmometer.

When Tommy, in the old-fashioned way, says he is not going to bed, we must not argue with him in the good, old-fashioned way, or promise him a piece of candy before breakfast if he is a good boy. We must put the ergograph on his index finger, and the sphygmometer on the bridge of his nose, and when he is thus adorned, we must discover whether his unwillingness results from fatigue and dread of ascending the stairs, or from "weariness," which is brain fag. If from fatigue, he must be sent out to walk

about the square with his papa; if weariness, an extra meal must be set before him, and he be invigorated by a favourite dish, temptingly prepared.

If it were permissible, I should myself invoke the saints that Tommy go to sleep on the parlour sofa early. I do not know a harder thing to accomplish than to get a father in slippers and smoking jacket, to quit his evening paper and lead a sleepy boy around the block, except indeed to prepare a "favourite dish" when cook has gone up, and the fire is low. "If Professor Rowe had our Seraphina," began Jane—but then he hasn't. We have Seraphina.

The Germans have other directions for the mother, which come under the head of "suggestion." They say she must go into a dark room, shut out all distracting sights and sounds, and, to the exclusion of every other thought, muse upon The Child, his individualisms, his preferences, his outward form, his inner content. A creature who does not see, hear, walk, talk, or breathe properly, is certainly food for thought, but all these can be corrected if the room is dark enough and the mother brings her whole thinking power to bear on the being of the boy.

To him, she is to be the violet ray which will absorb the lupus. And although his utterance be indistinct, she should listen to it.

But lately from the celestial regions and trailing clouds of glory as he comes, he retains much of

their wisdom. Every word should be carefully picked up and put into a bottle, though a careful mother will put the bottle out of reach, lest he do the thing he would not do and swallow his own words.

As for his sentences, when he begins to converse, of course she will frame them, first working them in wool on cardboard. I am sure "Give it to me," "I wan' my breakfast," will look much better over the mantelpiece than the *passé* "God Bless Our Home."

I acknowledged that it is only recently that The Child has come into our own horizon. Janet and James have grown up, and they were "raised," to use a term familiar to partially civilised farming districts, on the old plan—that of neglect, alternating with ill-judged indulgence. Unfortunately, for the example's sake, they not only survived, but are strong placid creatures, such as Professor Rowe would fondly hope you may make of your imperfect little Tommy, if you do your duty by him; and I am perfectly aware that I have incurred the deepest resentment in the bosom of my best friends because, in just retribution for their irresponsible bringing up, Janet is not a warning to evil-doers, and James is not in a penal institution. On the contrary—with—I was about to say the irony of fate, but am prevented the use of the phrase by a Ruskinish denunciation from Mr. Henley—such is fate's injustice,

these children of an unenlightened parent have grown up to abash her with their impeccability, to compel her to keep her lamp filled, her wick clean, for very shame before their industry.

And just here I will slip in a remark which, while it is of the nature of digression, it will relieve me to make. I do not of course know whether it has been your fortune to live in the house with people in whom no fault is to be found, but I can testify that if it were not for Jane and a poor-spirited housemaid, in whose characters I can pick flaws, I should long ago have quit my home, and become a reciter of monologues at private entertainments, where I was hired not for my talent, but "to assist a worthy gentlewoman."

So to hark back. The Child, whom others know, or say they know, has never shone for me, but for these less lucky people has been shining a long time. The attitude of breathless respect, the phrases "sanctity of childhood," "blessedness of innocence," the "hist" look parents put on when he opens the lips in which his milk teeth linger at intervals—all this has been known and suffered for a good while, but we have regarded it as we did the Boer war, taking sides first with one party, then with the other, and congratulating ourselves that we got over our fighting in '65.

But the experiences of others are entertaining. A gentleman told me lately that now his children are small, between the ages of four and six (I use the

old word "children," but an intelligent person will understand there can be several manifestations of The Child in the same house at the same time—the temple Buddha, the column Buddha, the shrine Buddha—you have noticed this in the sacred precincts of the god),—he can protect himself from their onslaughts by a barricade of sofas and chairs. But to ensure for himself whole limbs, when they get to be seven and eight, he is practising pistol shooting.

While one can but admire this man's forethought, I don't think firearms ought to be resorted to, except in extreme instances. The Child may be diverted from inflicting serious injuries upon his parents. I myself have found sticks of candy useful, and promises of ponies or canary birds. Any of these chimerical gifts used to disarm both Janet and James, and bring about what powder and shot will doubtless fail to do.

What The Child wants, I take it, now and always, is its own way; and an even imperfectly educated parent will give it him without resorting to deadly weapons.

And yet I do not know that I should either sell or give away my pistol.

Mr. Walter Pater says: "There is a time in The Child's life when he seems to experience a passionateness in his relation to fair, outward objects—an inexplicable excitement in their presence which dis-

turbs him and from which he longs to be free. With the coming of the gracious summer guise of fields, flowers, and persons in each succeeding season of the year, comes a desire for entire possession of them, and a kind of tyranny of the senses comes over him."

This explanation of The Child's "passionateness toward fair, outward objects, flowers, fields, and 'even' persons," has been noticed in almost every family, and though one may hesitate to call one's self "fair," candidly, since we have seen that "our presence does disturb him," let the pistol stay a while. As to his "longing to be free, as expressed by a kind of tyranny of the senses," I suppose this light on his character will carry comfort to mothers when family portraits are used as targets for slingshots, the furniture disfigured with pocket knives, and the banisters must be repaired after he has spent a rainy day in the house.

Another suggestion. In Bar Harbor this summer, there was a lady who resorted to this expedient. The doctor said she must live quietly and at peace. So, being a woman of means, she engaged three houses. In the first and best, she put her children; in the second, her servants; in the smallest and least desirable, she put herself.

III

The Tell-Tale House

IF I wanted to conceal my real life, temperament, or opinions from certain discriminating individuals, I would not let them into my house. The house is more revealing than the conversation or any single act, or, for that matter, than any number of acts. One may assimilate a character until, as far as the outer circle is concerned, she may be that character. Knowing her as a member of the same literary club, as one of the committee board, or even through meeting her at country houses, I may judge my acquaintance to be large-minded, generous, hospitable, deeply cultured; or I may, from similar opportunities, decide that she is the opposite of all these qualities. But a woman's appearance in all semi-public functions is illusory. Enter the front door, step into the room where she lives or where she would have you think she lives, and you come upon the real person, and that without one word from her.

“But,” says the sceptic, “you forget that a woman's home is not always the expression of herself.

On the contrary, it is the expression of his mother's taste, or first wife's taste, or of the taste of her young, crude life, which she has long outgrown. And oftener still it is a simple expression of impotence, of bald and hideous poverty, which must exist with bare walls and pine tables and chairs. There is more pathos," adds the carper—who, had she lived in the eighteenth century, would be described as a person of sensibility—"there is more pathos in a faded photograph of the Sistine Madonna than in the finest steel engraving that hangs on these walls."

And all of this is true and would deprive me of the wind that is supposed to waft this communication to your consideration, did she who addresses you mean that taste is a revelation of the mind or soul. Taste, after all, is in a measure external. A whole-souled, open-minded person—(though it is hard to believe it)—may buy, because she admires them, red satin chairs and red cut velvet sofas, and even choose an 8 x 10 coloured lithograph of "The Missionary's Return," and encase it in a decorated 30 x 40 oak frame studded with gold nails; she may commit these crimes against society, and at the same time have a real love of books, and clear ideas about the bringing up of children. I doubt if she can be permanently interesting, because she must lack perception and observation; but even these are not the qualities, were I aware that I possessed them, that would tempt me to turn the key on a visitor. What

I should fear would be disclosed are the lack of the more important qualities of sincerity and judgment, and a sense of proportion in expenditure. Unluckily, these are the characteristics of the housewife's mind which her home betrays.

Now, to begin with sincerity. Sincerity, the moralists tell us, marks the aristocrat, secretiveness the plebeian; because force, which disdains concealment, shows the lord, while cunning is the weapon of the lowly. But although this aphorism sounds well, I have seen well-born women, without even the excuse of timidity, who are ambitious of being thought cultured and literary, and who, therefore, attempt to impose this impression on their acquaintances by creating a fictitious air of culture in their homes. With the greatest pains they scatter books on the centre table, distribute the freshest magazines, put the paper knife invitingly in the latest volume of essays or plays, and even draw a comfortable chair to the corner where the light falls best, and where the talked-of novel has slid easily on to the floor.

This sort of insincerity is so plausible, so imitative of virtue, that it deserves to succeed. But, to borrow a phrase, alas for the moral responsibility of inanimate things. This meritorious effort does not deceive. The table, arranged to produce an impression, exhibits an obstinacy that, if it were a fractious child, would send it to bed without its sup-

per. It is as tell-tale as the immemorial little shirt upon which Mrs. Rawdon Crawley sewed for successive years, till Rawdon could not have gotten his brawny forefinger in its tiny armhole. That stationary look that enraged the fair Becky characterizes the impromptu chair. 'Tis pity, but 'tis true, that not only literature itself, but the human element, must be combined with literature to produce the atmosphere of culture.

And as there are people who would like to be thought cultured without being willing to take the trouble of really being so, so there are people who would like to be thought hospitable, and who take a great deal of pains to give their homes the externals of generous proportions and the accessories of welcome, in comfortable furniture, space, and studied carelessness of arrangement. But again the provoking atmosphere. "There is nothing the matter with the horse," says Sancho Panza, "but the horse is dead." The supposititious guest who did not sit in the inviting arm-chair last night, or for many a night, has left it cold. All the housewifely care that you have bestowed on your drawing-room, madam, in the matter of conscientious airing and opening of windows, has not generated that feeling of warmth, combined with crisp friendliness, that is the ideal environment.

I would not go so far as to say that empty rooms are peopled with the shades of the departed, but

something of the past remains. If this had been a rendezvous, as you would have me think it, of gay, cheerful, companionable people, the air were not chill and damp, but it would be indescribably permeated with their presence. There would be something vital, human, in the very greeting of sofas and chairs.

The attempt to do what you are doing was made long ago and with just as much success, madam. The salon of the Petit Luxembourg was supposed to be the rival of the Hôtel Rambouillet, but in spite of the sumptuously painted ceilings, the almost regal decorations, the simple *salon bleu* bore away the palm.

And then, you may be above it, and would not care, but I, faint-hearted, would not like to have one who was not kind see our house if there were no uniformity of care or expenditure. As it is a pity to put all one's eggs in one basket, it is a pity to furnish one room to the slighting of other rooms. Then too, like the other evidences of insincerity against which I have warned you, this particular attempt to produce a false impression is so seldom successful, and there is something so heartrending in a futile lie! The door is sure to spring open and disclose the wastes beyond; you are at the mercy of fiendish infants and stupid servants.

But hard and perilous as it is to live wholly for other people, I have learned to regard with a *souf-*

gon of suspicion the mistress who lives wholly for herself.

“The rest of the house,” you will hear the intellectually superior person say, “belongs to the world, but I express myself here.” And she displays some airy chamber on the second floor that she calls her “den”; and, it may as well be confessed, the day was when the writer was much impressed with this phrase, and felt as though she were really to see the naked soul laid bare, and, stripped of its extraneous trappings, the real woman step forth. But experience has taught her that this sort of expression of personality is characteristic of narrowness and selfishness. It would be selfish to absorb the best, were it a peach or a cozy seat by the fire. Why not call it selfish to make one’s own intellectual and artistic atmosphere, without regard to that to be breathed by the rest of the household? Why should all the best books, and the good pictures, and the effective draperies be consecrated to Lavinia, who has a pretty taste for such things, while the rest of us look at chromos and sit in gilt straw chairs.

At the time when servile admiration for the practical obtained, a lady with a reputation for being an “excellent housekeeper,” and what old-fashioned people called a “good manager,” could throw the windows of her soul wide open to the sun with a remark like this: “I like books very well in their proper place, but don’t want them littering up my

house. I want them in the library, where they belong, in bookcases under lock and key to keep out the dust."

But times have changed. Nobody would dare to free herself of this barbarous sentiment in this, the age of aspiration and longing. And they are no longer looked up to as "difficult" and "exclusive"—the people whose daily orders to the butler were "not at home," and whose drawing-room was a coveted and denied paradise.

It is the mode to be both literary and hospitable. One is served to weak tea and macaroons where once the door was shut in one's face; and on a mantel but lately adorned with *bisque china* shepherdesses, to-day a cast of Donatello's or one of Perugino's saints looks down, blending meek acquiescence with a prayerful yearning of the impassioned soul. Unluckily, neither effort produces the coveted environment.

But a word in the ear from one who, without self-praise, may describe herself as having performed as many offices to those whom she addresses as has a folding-bed to its owner. The real thing, that we care enough for to pretend to, is not hard to attain. The time taken to produce an impression that one has a love of books, were it given to reading them, would generate the atmosphere we would exhale,

IV

Servants

I AM perfectly aware that it is not proper to talk about servants. When certain people do so, they become vulgar. It takes the most refined and sensitive nature to discuss intimate topics. But perhaps that knowledge adds to the zest, so that, when, as happened only yesterday, three ladies threw aside the shackles of conventionality, and frankly told what their maids had said and done, and exchanged confidences upon this most vital subject, there were character-drawing, experience, self-revelation, every constituent of a moving drama. These ladies told a great deal about their servants, but they told more about themselves. To be sure, their own fresh impressions as to how to treat servants, which was the topic of the conversation, would have been more original, and would have contained more practical information, had they not polluted the pure stream of their thought by recent literature upon the subject, and by trying to appear well, each to the other; but there were touches of sincerity, moments when a plain confession was made, and I was sufficiently

edified to give you the benefit of their avowals, acknowledging at the same time that the subject is not quite what may be pleasing to your cultured ears.

"How do you treat your servants?" asked the young married lady of her somewhat more experienced friend, and the latter was quick with her reply:

"With the greatest deference and respect. My attitude in giving an order is one of hesitation, the 'May I?' manner in which Charles Reade's heroines got their way."

"I think you are wrong," said the first-named. "I treat them like machines. I do not even know their last names. I never require them to give me extra hours, extra work, or to take any duty which they are not specifically engaged to do. When I am ill I wait upon myself, for there is no servant in the house who is engaged to nurse me. Nothing, not a case of scarlet fever or a conflagration in the kitchen, prevents each taking her afternoon out when the day comes. And in return, when their brother-in-law dies, or they have a chill, I am in utter ignorance of their personal affairs. Nor does this come from hard-heartedness. The experience of life has taught me that servants prefer the relations between themselves and their employers to be purely that of business. They resent our intrusion into their affairs, as much as we resent their intrusion into ours. I had a very clever maid once, who, when I asked her why she left her last place, said, 'I found myself

getting attached to the children, and as I knew that they would not be attached to me after they left the nursery, and that I was laying up heart-breaks and disappointments for myself, I gave notice. Had I stayed, I should have been considering their interests instead of my own, perhaps doing extra work; and, had my employer gotten into money difficulties, and, had I let myself go on being interested in them, I might even have taken lower wages. As I could not, as a servant, be anything to them, common sense told me that was all wrong. It hurt me a little when I came away, but I have gotten over it now, just as the children have stopped missing me. I shall never put myself into such temptation again.' ”

And then the eldest woman, who for years had been walking the long and dusty way, was asked to tell her story.

“ I shut my eyes, I put wax in my ears; when the housemaid scolds me, I am deaf; when the cook takes food to support her husband and children and coals to warm them, I think of the scriptural injunction: ‘ She who does not provide for her own household is no better than a heathen.’ I do not make them my bosom friends, as you say you do (addressing the first speaker), or consult them as to what I shall wear, nor do I treat them as if they were the furnace or the doorbell; but I treat them as I do other people, whom I expect now and then to tell fibs and be cross and impose upon me. I am perfectly willing to bear

an outbreak of temper from one whose soup is uniformly good; and when I want a hot-water bag, I ask for it, although I know the maid hates to fetch it and will call me uncomplimentary names when she gets back to the kitchen, where she is entertaining her young man, against my orders. But then I prefer to be waited on to being liked; and I would rather, really, have a comfortable dinner than the affection of the cook."

Now if I have succeeded in interesting you at all in these experiences, you will want to know how the different plans worked; and I shall have to tell you that the last speaker alone succeeded in creating about her an atmosphere of ease and good cheer. She who treated her servants as if they were machines discovered that machines also have their whims; and as stoves, for unaccountable reasons, do not draw, while chimneys smoke; so human beings served as stoves and chimneys also get out of order without reason, and refuse to do their work. When a neighbor offered the clever maid a dollar or two more wages a month than her mistress paid, the accomplished menial quit her rational home and her sensible employer, without so much as a word of explanation. The first of the group found, after a while, that she could not have her mother to visit her, because that lady did not come up to the cook's idea of an agreeable person; and that the feelings of the parlour maid cut the family off from interesting

topics, like European politics and the anarchist movement in Chicago. But the house which one is bound to describe as governed under lax principles is a warm, generous place, where the welcome is hearty, and even the housemaid, who is not above supplying her necessities out of her mistress' surplus, wears a smiling countenance, and of her own accord serves tea. To be sure, one would like honesty. I hope you will not think me narrow-minded if I venture to say that I would not myself employ a person whom I knew to be a thief. With something of the same passion Jane and I regard our things as did Mrs. Gereth hers, in the tragic "Spoils of Poynton"—inferior as our possessions are to those inanimate wreckers of happiness. But, if ease in living be purchasable, I think my friend is right to buy it at its price.

What we ask of servants is a question so seldom put that it would be a waste of time to ask it here, were it not that now and then one has an experience like that of Lady Ruthven, which Mr. Augustus J. C. Hare mentions in his "Memoirs." A person wrote to Lady Ruthven for a recommendation of her former footman, and she expressed herself in the following remarkable words: "Is he clean, intelligent, non-alcoholic, not a smoker, a church member, kind, truthful, and generally competent?" To which modest requirements Lady Ruthven replied: "Madam, if John Smith could have answered

in the affirmative half your questions, I would have married him long ago."

But the fact is that what servants require of us is so much more important than what we require of them, that I would gladly coach any mistress if I only knew what would be likely to make her popular with this difficult class. But it is hard to know what to say. For instance, the other day I was like Hamlet, "between the incensed points of mighty opposites," when an entrancing looking cook, of whom we were in dire need, asked whether or not we had much company. Should I tell her no, and have her go away because we did not live up to her ideas of gentility, or should I say yes, and then have her refuse because of extra work? These are matters that disturb persons who have a conscientious dislike for telling futile falsehoods.

A friend who has a large establishment informs me that her butler, an Englishman, was good enough to give her husband a character. "My master," he said, "is a gentleman. He knows his place. He never finds fault with a hunder servant except through a hupper servant, nor never casts a shadder on a hupper servant in the presence of a hunder." After this hint from high authority, Jane and I, who are imitative creatures, sent word to the charwoman by the cook that the abandoned condition of cellar stairs had caused the threatened visit of our Aunt Caroline to be awaited with shame and confusion;

which plan worked all right as far as the cook's part, but came near bringing us in the patrol wagon to the police court under an indictment of the incensed "hunder servant."

But a servant will now and then prove a friend. Once Browning was away on a holiday, and a person connected with the press came to his house and asked if it was true that the poet was dead. "I have heard nothing of it," said the faithful caretaker, "and I am sure my master would never have done such a thing without giving full notice." "Oh, I assure you," said the reporter, "those kind of people often die that way, Dickens did, and so did Thackeray." Now it is straining credulity to the verge of snapping, when I tell you that I myself have seen a cook doing the family wash, and one who looked a shade responsible when the lard melted three days before its hour. But this was deep in the gloom of the nineteenth century. To-day, no proud, imperious spirit need blush to be mistress of a domain of which she is queen, and the recipient of homage to which that offered to the Emperor of Germany is as feathers to lead.

To be a cook, one must have suffered, studied, experimented. Above all, one must be capable of all control except self-control. I am told that the haughty spirit which housekeepers notice in all cooks is necessary in the preparation of highly seasoned, spicy food. The temper of a cook enters into her

condiments, as the spirit of Emerson's dead warrior entered that of his conqueror.

A friend of mine lately ventured into her cook's kitchen, and suggested a less violent demeanour towards the butler, and was sent out with the scornful "Do you want your sauces to taste like sweetened milk and raw flour? I put *myself* into my dinners." And if this be true, I can testify that "myself" was as fiery as love, and as penetrating as the odour of Mr. James Lane Allen's hempfields. Indeed, though she may be a small, thin person one could easily blow out of the window (for the new cook, unlike the old, governs by moral, not physical force), she inspires a chill terror which the boldest housebreaker cannot flatter himself to evoke.

Nor should a lady of intellectual tastes decline to be a cook, lest her studies be interrupted. Our own cook is of a literary turn, and devotes much of her time to reading. Her shelf of books hangs over the kneading board, and above the table is a self-acting roll, not a bread roll, on which are inscribed aphorisms from Epictetus. While she is beating cake with one hand, she turns the leaves of some interesting volume with the other. As to the shelf of books, I ought to say that it was not my original idea, but that of Colonel Higginson, whose culinary directions have, as we say, greatly influenced me. "In every kitchen," says the champion of our rights, "there should be a shelf of books, that

while the potatoes are boiling and the pie baking, she may lift herself out of her sordid surroundings, and keep the highest company." But it depends upon what sort of cook you have, as to what books you select. Jane says I am over particular, but I confess it makes me feel creepy when I see "Poisons and their Antidotes," in Seraphina's hands when she is making up bread.

The children tell me that, with her, cooking is a means to an end, that when she has sent us all to the almshouse, she is going to be a doctor. I know that, before she entered this simple abode, she waited in a summer hotel in Massachusetts, which presupposes a college education; and yet there are times when I think of the fact that Dr. Koch was one of the few physicians who tested his discoveries upon himself. There are times when I am afraid Seraphina will experiment with the "Poisons," but forget the "Antidotes." And then I wish she could not read. I am not one to keep all the learning to myself, but, as the Catechism says, "such is my desire."

But to go back to the shelf, for though Seraphina has her own "special friends," as we say, in her own apartment, we are supposed to supply them. But what books? A sensitive cook might be offended even by a title. A friend of mine gave "Ethics of the Dust" to her parlour maid, but she returned it with the remark that she herself resembled Mallarmé,

the French poet, whose delicate sensibility could not endure the obvious. After this I would not put on my shelf such books as "Red as a Rose Is She," or "Born of Flame." She might look upon it as something personal, if one slipped in "The Lost Receipt," and it would never do to let her catch a glimpse of Tourguenieff's "Smoke." She'd have the plumbers in the house in a trice.

A high-minded cook would certainly resent Smiles' "Self Help," nor should I dare to give her Poe's "Bells"; she might take it for a hint. A depressed cook might be comforted, on the other hand, by "Saved by Fire," a practical cook be disappointed did she take up Arlo Bates' "Wheel of Fire," expecting something about waffles; or, looking for a dissertation on "Gravies," light upon "Thicker than Water." And one would hate to have her puzzling over "Peregrine Pickle," and not finding what she seeks. "Free to Serve" is a great book, but it touches upon delicate ground. The Hampton student might like it, but how about the ancient retainer? "And," says Mrs. Bell, "our first duty is to make our cooks happy."

"*Ah, di me,*" as the Spaniards say, in old times how well we knew how to do it. It was by presenting Bridget with an apple-green shawl, and a bonnet composed of fall vegetables, or walking like Nydia, the night of the conflagration, with fast-shut eyes, through the kitchen, oblivious of the presence of

from four to six (familiar hours) cousins taking tea.

But one mocks at one's self when one thinks of illuminating the shady path of the haughty young person who says, "Don't you?" (in our part of the world it is made to sound like a remonstrance against a popular, but objectionable habit), "and would like," if we have quite done with it, "to borrow our *North American*."

"But, mamma," says Janet, our only daughter, who is a literal person, "how is one to learn to cook; the receipt books are so puzzling,—ordering one to get things that are not patented, and asking for bay-leaves and fresh mushrooms. And you remember the cooking school?"

"The cooking school!" Even over the stolid features of the males of our family, a ray of something like alarmed interest passed. We all called out with rare unanimity, "Oh, yes! we remember the cooking school." And then the inquirer's parent gave the following advice.

The real way to learn how to cook is to absorb the science through literature. Art brave enough to own that thou hast lived so long as to have read the works of Elizabeth K. Wetherell? In the pages of "The Wide World," in "Queechy," in those of a classic called "The Old Helmet," there are the fullest directions how to make coffee, pancakes, pies, and other New England articles of diet. The author,

though old-fashioned, knew the unchanging heart of man. So instead of making her heroines clever or beautiful, she made them sensitive and cooks. One can learn, between a conviction of sin and a watery love scene, exactly how to whip up an eggless custard, and to make tea out of the roots of the sassafras. A better or more economical cook than Fleda, in "Queechy," and a more experienced hand in getting a meal than Ellen Montgomery, never taught girls the gentle art of winning souls. Mrs. Whitney, who is also not without discernment, shrewdly throws in a way of roasting oysters, while she brings up a somewhat lagging swain. When Esther would ask a favor of her Lord, she made him a feast. I should take Mr. Gissing, too, for a "good provider," as shown in the meals in "The Whirlpool," and Mr. Howells is really not only eloquent in "The Landlord of Lion's Head," but explicit. This is the most refined and, at the same time, most practical way to learn how to cook; for these receipts result in something. The good cook, like Fleda, gets the Earl; and the poor one goes without.

V.

The Visited and the Visitor

HOSPITALITY exercised in moderation is not a crime, and there are social gatherings which may be described as entertainments, and when so called, leave not one smirch on the fair garment of veracity. A hostess with a passion for hospitality may, even without violating the laws of humanity, give an evening party, if her guests are young people with healthy stomachs, and spirits over which this gloomy function has little power. For young people, with their indifference to food, and regardlessness of poison in night air, find sufficient happiness in the mere fact of being alive and together. But, there are times when I have permitted myself to wonder whether, if it were not for the disciplinary effect of giving and receiving, this would not be a brighter world, if we had high walls around our castles, from which we issued only to go to market, while our neighbours guarded their entrances with rifles.

Regarded as a discipline, I do not see why conscientious persons should not substitute entertaining

for the old-fashioned hair shirt or flagellation. I have often seen people in the street whom I have suspected of indulging in these religious practices, judging from their air of fatigue commingled with a sort of exaltation. But later, I have discovered that they had been giving a series of dinners, or even harbouring a distinguished guest. And then something familiar in the mien told me that no hair shirt or whip produced that look of anxiety mingled with importance—that it was the “anxious hostess” look, naturally confounded with the effect of these pious acts, but not to be mistaken by an expert. It is, in fact, the look that comes from giving out table linen, making up menus, propitiating servants, and flattering them with deceitful and beguiling phrases which, alas! defeat their own ends. It is the look born of inventing graceful speeches, introducing people to each other, and cracking one’s brains in trying to recollect names. It is oh, crown of martyrdom!—the effort to appear cheerful that stamps its heel upon the countenance.

Now a gift to the poor is soon done with, like having a tooth out; and one may fast, but there is a hot supper waiting at the end of the prescribed time. But doing good by filling one’s house seems to me to be more muzzling to the temper, and more of a demand upon the nerves, than any modern or even mediæval penance. The readers of Trollope will recollect that the only time in their long union

when the indomitable "Lady Glencora" yielded to the commands of the Duke, was when both heart and spirit were broken by repeated interviews with the housekeeper concerning the resources of Omnium Castle, in the matter of sheets and pillow cases for the three counties which she was entertaining. For my own part, I have seen a high-spirited woman who bore her dressmaker's ruin of a black velvet gown without a tear, burst into a passion of weeping, when the waffles, served to a visiting savant, came in pale and heavy-hearted.

Indeed, the effort to appear a little more gracious than we really are, a little better-mannered, a little richer, has its salutary effect, and a course of visitors humbles the mind as well as excites the ambition to be what we seem. From this point of view, I have nothing but good words for hospitality.

But there are hospitalities which, on being exercised, bestow no merit upon the hostess, because they are involuntary. Elizabeth, in the "German Garden," confesses that through no fault of her own she asked a person she neither knew nor liked to pass the Easter season with her, because she was requested to do so by another person to whom she even entertained an enmity. Elizabeth's festival, in consequence, became a howling wilderness, from the presence of her unwelcome guest; but I cannot count the act that brought this about for righteousness. To ask people whom we do not want to accept our

hospitality, because someone whom we dislike orders us to do so, is not virtue, but weakness. The fact is that I have thought so much about the virtue of hospitality that I have gotten all tangled up, and I am about to offer you this moral axiom: The real good to be extracted from its exercise is—be hospitable, but do not enjoy it; be miserable in giving up your own sitting-room, and resigning it to those whose society you do not crave, but at the same time, feign pleasure in the sacrifice.

It has been suggested that a good-natured visitor may do much to relieve the hostess of her cares and responsibilities. But there is something to say on the other side. There is a charm—a subtle charm, but an undeniable one—in giving one's own invitations, and ordering one's own carriage. I recollect inviting a friend to pass a week with me, and, that week having been completed, hearing with some quakings at the heart another of my visitors urge this friend to prolong her stay. The reasons presented by this dispenser of vicarious hospitality were so excellent—so indisputable, it was made so clear why the visit should be lengthened, and our common friend was so insistent, that I have always regarded it as a triumph of diplomacy that my visitor (I call her *my* visitor, but at that time she was presented to me as the visitor of my guest), had the presence of mind to invent an ill mother to whom she was bound to go at the appointed time. But we were not so

lucky in another experience. We asked a young gentleman, a friend of James, to pay us a visit in the country. This young man was not content with making himself at home. He was good enough to try to make us at home. I could not move my seat from the fire-place to the window that he did not urge me to take another chair, for that which I had chosen was so uncomfortable; he was sure he could get me one that was better suited to repose. Our butler is a cross old man, still he knows us, and we know him; but when I appeared at five o'clock, and the tea urn did not appear with me, our guest would run to the bell, ring it violently, and reprove the tottering Henry because he had not been on time. At dinner his care for us all was touching. He urged the soup upon John, recommended me to taste the salad. "May I serve you [a vulgarism which a missionary should stamp out] to this ragout? It is exactly right." And then, and in what follows lies a solemn warning, the payer of bills looked up, and in a tone to which arctic ice was as a Warm Springs bath, remarked: "Thank you, but I am quite at home; I shall not, however, be so to-morrow. I am shutting up my house, and going to spend the remainder of the summer on a Fall River steamboat."

And this cruel uprooting by our natural protector—that John whose attractions grow apace with the years, and whom I would not exchange for a Mr. Rochester or a Granville de Vigne, nor, indeed, for

even a Reverend Patrick Brontë! this cruel uprooting was the thankless reward of trying to make things pleasant to people whose business it was to manage that affair themselves. How full of pitfalls, the way of the guest! How narrow the way between accepting hospitality with indifference, and taking for granted that people mean what they say! You do not permit a stranger to give you advice? And yet she would fain breathe this little word: "They never mean what they say. Especially fear her who tells you that her house is Liberty Hall, and that everyone must do as she chooses. In such a house, it is safe to take an alarm clock, so as to be punctual at breakfast, and to profess a passion for driving with one's back to the horses."

"But," says the friend in whom I have the most implicit confidence, who is looking over my shoulder, "have you nothing to say of the long hours of boredom we who are supposed to be entertained spend in your house, walking up and down your stairway in our white robes, like the angels on Jacob's ladder? Have not your invitations littered our desks for a dozen years. Have you not forced our presence by your insistent cards?"

To be frank, yes. The habit of hospitality grows upon one. A friend who has entertained a great deal tells me that her diseased imagination often pictures her to herself, as presenting people whom she does not know to each other, in the street cars—

of introducing in church, during the hours of service, mothers to daughters, husbands to wives, and this from the mere force of habit in repeating a formula. She cannot go to a concert without distorting her countenance in an attempt to count noses; and once she was caught looking at a Bird of Paradise in a stranger's hat, and muttering—oblivious of the impression she was making, "Hot, cold, soufflé, hash." But, however popular her entertainments, one drop of bitterness too often tinctures the cup.

I have yet to see the man over twenty-five who ever wanted to attend a social function, and I have seen dozens of the male relatives of eager women caught and kept in the back yard, with ball and chain about their ankles, awaiting the hour when they would be called upon to act as escorts. For this reluctance to be entertained, on the part of the one simple and candid survival of another age, in a morbid and distracted generation—Man, we must find a reason. I think we have it, do we but examine into our means of diverting our guests.

But for the accessories of tables and chairs, instead of rugs and divans, our own house, on the occasion of one of Janet's functions, would remind the guest of a "fantisir" given by an Arab Sheik, in his own sunny land. We bow them to a row of seats within view of a raised dais and a curtain, and there our responsibility for the evening ends. And it is all so like a return to Oriental civilisation, that insensibly

we wait breathless for the Gewazee girls, in silken skirts, with waves of silver flashing in the meshes, with bracelets of jewels and anklets of gold, with necklaces of sequins, and faces powdered with *thanaka*. We wait for the dance to begin, the dance pensive, passionate, graceful, dramatic, the dance that tells in speaking attitude the story of the East, its luxury, its fire, its degradation, its despair. This is what we expect—but this is not what we see. When our curtain is drawn, it is upon the spectacle of an infant phenomenon who, for three mortal hours, repeats speeches and poems in two continental languages. The infant phenomenon's claim upon us is that he is the protégé of that old enemy, the woman whom we have never seen and never heard of, until we were commanded by a person who had sat at her board, to do our best to make him the fashion. Or it may be that our curtain is lifted on a wandering musician, who strikes the chords of our superannuated piano until they shrink tremblingly out of sight—an act which I myself would willingly perform—or upon a young lady of spotless reputation, and an unblemished pedigree, who has taken it into her head to learn on us to fit herself for the stage. The repertoire of this sort of young lady ranges from the sleep-walking scene in "Macbeth" to "Curfew Must Not Ring To-night." And it must be said that she is of a conscientious character, determined to give us our money's worth. We have

printed programmes, and they lead us to expect that we shall have "Juliet in the Balcony" scene, "How Persimmon Took Care of the Baby," "The Seven Ages of Man," or Poe's "Raven." Ten minutes are allowed us for lukewarm tea and macaroons, handed over our heads—another reminder of the Orient, had Turkish paste been substituted for these viands. Janet tells me that anything so definite as a supper interrupts the intellectual enjoyment accruing from the recitations. I am sure that I do not like to remind people of unpleasant things, but you may recall the fact that "Curfew" has a culminative quality, and works up to its climax. But our actress in embryo put on all her steam in the first four stanzas; therefore, when she reached "Wild her eyes, and pale her forehead," no sound issued from her lips, and the unliterary portion of her audience do not know to this day whether it rang or not.

Another time our entertainer was a woman who had called at the house, and asked for money to return to the home of her youth, she having found the climate of our city inimical to her health. But Janet informed us that the solicitor should not be permitted to wrest her support from our community, nor would it be right to imperil the lady's self-respect by providing her with funds without a working equivalent from her. By some occult process, unknown either to Jane or myself, Janet then extracted the confession that our suppliant was a poet, and it

entered the somber but practical brain of our daughter that these poems might be read to an audience, that we might provide that audience, and call the invitation a "soirée," saving the delicate feelings of the authoress by giving her the money to buy her ticket. It was a terrible decision. Fortunately the grippe was about, and the rapidity with which we received excuses was revealing. In fact, I do not believe that we would ever have succeeded in enticing anybody to our house again, and henceforth we would have lived the life of the Essenian hermits, had not John taken things in his own manly grasp, and sent out this card: "At home from ten to three. Dancing. Supper from twelve to two, terrapin, canvas-back ducks, breasts of quail, wild roast turkey stuffed with chestnuts, glacé puddings, creams, ices, Madeira, champagne, liqueurs."

So much for the visited and their failures. And if I spoke my mind, I should say that of the two, the persons whom I have just discussed have chosen the better part. As hard as it is to entertain, it is harder to be entertained. Still, were an orphan, with a wicked uncle for guardian, and no home of her own, to write and ask me for advice as to how she was to conduct herself during her round of summer visits, I should feel myself bound to say something like the following in her ear. You have perhaps noticed at the pleasantest houses an unattached female, not particularly pretty, or young, or

rich or even interesting, but whose engagement book is always full—who goes from seashore to mountains, to the select country house and the gay party, warmly greeted and eagerly sought by people who have their choice of guests. By close observation of her conduct, you will perceive that she has the negative, but comfortable quality of giving no trouble about small matters.

For instance, she is not recovering from nervous prostration, and is not compelled to eat a thing of dough called “The health biscuit,” which is only procurable at a small shop, miles down-town, and sold by a widow of good birth, but reduced circumstances, who invented it; she eats the vegetables that grow under ground and those which soàr aloft, with no *arrière pensée* as to their moral influence; she has no repugnance to beef or mutton, not having professed the faith of Buddha, nor does she require dry, hot toast for breakfast—a viand Jane and I offer to our guests—but we are offended do they accept it. I might add that, while not incurring the enmity of others by an unfailing punctuality, she is generally on time, and does not lose her parasol, or, if she does, her heart bleeds in secret, and she does not send fat, breathless old Mr. Dana back to look for it.

I do not say that this wise woman does not use some tact to conceal her talents; that she does not play golf a little less well than she can; that she does

not refrain from telling an interesting anecdote which, to a simpler person, would seem apropos. The fact is, she dresses in grey, and acts as a background to other people's reds and yellows; she listens, rather than talks; and after an evening of "Oh, yes," "I quite understand you," goes off with an embossed and signed certificate for brilliancy in conversation. The repression of self is necessary in order to gain a reputation for agreeability, and though I do not say "Visit," because visiting requires this sacrifice, I give you a recipe for getting invitations.

Now, one single word upon a most delicate matter, the matter of fees. I know that high-minded people refrain from tipping servants, because, they say, they have delicate consideration for the next guest, who may not be able to give, and that any generosity may cause discontent. If generosity means money, I should like to say that no human being ever was discontented with an offer of money. Why, the Emperor of Austria—but Jane says I must be prudent in these days of international misunderstandings. So I should tell my orphan to pay liberally. But whom? John says that, as he provides for the establishment, he should be paid first; and Janet's mamma that, as she gives the orders, she should be paid next. But this sentiment has not been permitted to pass our lips, lest it reflect upon our unstained reputation for hospitality. As she cannot pay us,

she should pay the butler, Henry. Henry, when the generosity of the visitor is bounded by a dollar, after a visit of five weeks, does he hear that we have bidden her again, sets the tea things down with a thud, and sulks. I know that I am his mistress, and should not mind, but mistress is a flattering term, and, like Verlaine, when he was elected "prince of poets," "I take calmly a title to which is attached no revenue"; so, under Henry's frown I lose spirit, and, if my invitation has not gone, recall it. Nor can I welcome with enthusiasm a lady at the mention of whose name Marie pulls my hair out by the roots. These are little things, but they make for discontent, and it is in the power of a person even in indigent circumstances to ingratiate herself with servants, and so secure a hearty reception, does she deny herself the whole year, barring a week in August perhaps, that she may be well with those on whom our peace depends.

VI

Dinner Parties

ANYBODY can give a tea or a ball. People, if there are enough of them, amuse themselves, and the hostess need not depend on even her "last, best friend," the supper table.

Of course, I should not presume to give you my own opinion on this delicate matter, but the person in whom I have the most implicit confidence tells me that the secret can be inscribed in one tiny sentence in the palm of the entertainer's hand: "Short menus for your lives. Short and toothsome, set the hour at eight, and be yourself going on to another function. Half an hour to break down the breast-works, and march through the wedding that noon, the play that night, and then to the broad avenues of common acquaintance." Longer time, and discussion will grow into argument, and your dinner party will meet the just reward of Mr. Lang's "History of Scotland"; longer time, and some "forceful" spirit will take the floor.

Two hours is enough.

And then as to the guests: Madam, your situation

is not without its perils. There are your debts to pay, and really the people who have shown you hospitality appear best in their own houses.

That ample figure, surmounted with the large, meek countenance, she looked remarkably well at the head of her own dinner-table, when a bank of flowers, and masses of glass and silver lay between your plate and hers; but is she to sit on Augustus' right, what on earth is he to say to her? Did you not promise Augustus? Well, a foolish oath were best broken. And there is your sister, and there is Augustus' sister, and you simply cannot bear the sight of people you must see every day with their feelings in bandages, the result of wounds inflicted by yourself. Above all, one must not be bidden without the other, and both are married, and there are four seats gone. The case is pitiful. The ladies are distilled virtue, but, alas! how little pure goodness does for a dinner party.

In fact, unassisted virtue has been known, like the death of Sheridan, to eclipse the gayety of nations.

Perhaps you'd best admit that a dinner-party should not have philanthropy for its object; and it is not given to bestow charity upon the socially deaf, dumb, and blind. And you must trample the tie of kindred under your feet, and never invite on the same occasion more than one member of the household. No one of us appears well before our relations.

In the presence of Jane, who knows exactly what

did happen, that witty and effective narrative dies on my lips.

Before Janet, the little story which really owes its charm to illustration, as the begonia to its foliage, becomes like the withered stalk of Indian maize.

“One day last week when I was in New York”—her clear, arresting gaze brings the quick blush—“Well, not last week, last year”—again that fixed look if inquiry—“Well, not I, but a friend of mine”—James hems three times. Is it a warning? Have I told it before to the same people—I, most unhappy dispenser of hospitality?

“A man’s foes,” saith the Scripture, “are of his own household.”

There was a time (and I relate it as I would some custom preserved in folklore, like the position of spirits in the Indian system or the cruel tyrant turned into wild parsnip), the time when young women did not go to school a quarter of a century, and people washed up their own breakfast things in cedar tubs and made jelly out of calves’ feet, when it was etiquette, did one give a feast, to bid every member of a household or none.

On one occasion, she who addresses you sat down with ten law relations, and five blood ones, including three sisters and an aunt.

She was lucky who went in to dinner on the arm of an uncle. A cousin caused cerebral excitement, but it is remarkable (may it never be your misfor-

tune to experience it) how little your opinion of the English Education bill affects the brother in-law who sits beside you; and how much like a fool one feels when conversing in a society way with one's papa, about the church's case against divorce.

I once had the mortification to hear a remark made by a lecturer friend who, just before his speech began, had dined under the patriarchal roof of a man who invited all his family to meet him.

He got up before a great audience, stammered, and then came out with: "And Noah, and his wife, and his sons and his sons' wives." Such was the obsession produced by sitting three hours under a tree and its branches.

A person was once counselling a young man to marry a lady whom his friends thought suitable. "But she is so tiresome," he objected. "I have taken her in to dinner three times lately, and my blood turned to water in my veins."

"Then by all means marry her, and you will never have to take her in to dinner again as long as you live."

But this does not remove a serious objection to matrimony if married people are invited to entertainments together, because each suffers from a certain consciousness of strangeness with what is most familiar. I once heard a novelist say that he had never been able to write unrestrainedly because, had he done so, his wife would have asked, "How did you come

to know that?" But if the presence of the wife is inimical to the exercise of the imaginative faculty, how much more is it so to the exercise of a certain chivalrous bearing, which, were he alone, might be his natural manner to women, but which her presence somehow checks. It is true men do not feel particularly responsible for the general appearance of their wives, though Mrs. Ward makes David Grieve ask Lucy, the evening after the dinner at Lord Driffield's, why she wore queer silk mitts, and a sort of a bed gown; but this unnatural remark is put into David's mouth by a woman. Nor do they, with affectionate proprietorship and pride, prod us on to tell our best stories, or air our pet theories.

In public a man's interest in his wife generally takes the form of dread lest she say something that will bore the company and convince his fellows that he has married a person of inferior native intelligence; and his feelings are proclaimed to her at least, in unmistakable phrase, such as "Oh, don't tell that, it's as old——" or, "If you must tell it, tell it properly," or, "Maybe I'd better tell it, though everybody——"

But oftenest he betrays his condition by his air of general misery. It is strange that a parent who really is responsible for a child seldom feels self-abasement when they meet in society; but a husband who has nothing to do with his wife's bringing up, the formation of her mind or manners, suffers, when

they are in company together, the agonies of an experimenter when his discovery is being tested before experts.

What sort of guests, then, should one invite?

A good mental condition for a dinner party includes just as much culture as is necessary for the development of the faculties, but not any burden of erudition heavy enough to diminish promptitude or elasticity of mind. This ponderous remark is really original, but would you think the better of it if I ascribed it to Dr. Johnson? If so, I defy you to prove that he did not at some period of his life say it.

And you must bring the right sort of people together. I myself heard a man boast that he was commissioned to take in to dinner on one occasion the wife of a man he had shot in a duel; but, though he insisted that his *savoir faire* bore him triumphantly through the ordeal, I should take it as an accident, rather than a precedent for my own conduct.

"It was a small affair," says Sir Grant Duff of a dinner he once went to in London, "but among the guests were Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bright, Sir George Trevelyan, and Malet the traveller. It should have been extremely brilliant, but it was one of the dull-est functions I ever attended. Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright told stories against each other about the extortions of the corn doctors, but Malet declared

that Chevalier, one of the guests, thought they must be talking about the corn laws, and strained his attention to hear." So you see that, having provided against every precaution, as Mrs. Partington ought to have said, this dinner of surpassing material was a failure. A pretty safe rule when we would bring people together is Lowell's: "That we like, likes us, no need of any fuss." But are we too well acquainted, as are husband and wife or brother and sister, our dinner is of a tameness. If most of the guests are strangers to each other, the personal note is lacking. But liking is such a solid, comfortable foundation upon which to build the social fabric. "A most agreeable person, whom I enjoy meeting at least once in three months." Oftener, and the little mystery that is the partially known person's halo, would be dispelled.

But the hostess must do her part. Browning says that a lady whose guest he was on a certain occasion, asked him if he was a poet; and when from natural modesty, he hesitated to call himself by this exalted name, she hastened to say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, you know Byron was one, and Shelley, Sir Timothy's son."

And there was once, and the tact displayed is passing commendation, a princess of Babylon who gave a dinner party to the witch of Endor, into whose charge Nebuchadnezzar, after his accident, had been committed. And this admirable hostess,

to quote the raconteur's own words, *par délicatesse pour lui*, would let nothing appear on the table which, in his unfortunate condition, could wound his feelings—no beef, not the suspicion of fricasseed veal. But on another occasion, from the same source, an Oriental scholar, I learn that diplomacy was with the guest. It was Friday, and he did not eat meat. The hostess was overwhelmed. "All flesh is grass," said the courteous and resourceful visitor, and fell to upon Southdown mutton. The subject is so wide that we feel like the socialistic young girl graduate before the problem of drains.

So much for the dinner party, about which I might have counselled you in fewer words by simply quoting Thackeray: "Every dinner is good, if it is good of its kind," which I suppose means that every dinner is good if there be no tragic combination of incompetency with ambition,

VII

Conversation

WE were reading aloud Sainte-Beuve, when we came upon this sincere expression of opinion: "I like society," said the Duchess of Maine, "because everyone listens to me, and I listen to no one."

How delightful this aristocratic opinion, expressed as only the highest nobility have a right to express themselves, with the freedom of birth and blood. Such would be the uttered sentiment of many, were we not held back by a false shame, and a wish to please.

I recollect hearing our once popular clergyman—popular before he decided "after a period of self-communion and appeals for direction, that it had been made plain that he must choose the wider sphere of usefulness, St. Barnabas"—define the secret of being agreeable, to a number of us who only wanted to be told what to do, in the following language:

"I can probably better illustrate than give my opinion in concrete form. My idea of an entirely charming person is Mrs. B——, she is one of those

always sympathetic and inspiring people who have no desire to make themselves heard, but are very pleasantly felt."

Now, of a truth, this favourite of her pastor was a fair, blonde lady who, from the prefix before her name, must at one time in her life have opened her lips to utter the word "yes," though she might have simply nodded her head—a device not unknown in our family, for John has adopted it. But the white flower of tribute laid at her feet was bestowed by one who evidently shared the opinion of the Duchess about listening and listeners. So true is this that Jane and I are thinking of making a unique reputation by letting the person who begins a sentence, prosecute and end the remark without interruption; and, damming up our own floods of speech, let the speaker's dribble through a flat and dusty country, till all is distilled, drop by drop.

There are rare and beautiful souls in the world, jewels rare, rare books, but rarest of all earthly things is a completed sentence. It seems impossible to let her go on. Our own experience was so much more apposite, and when our visitor talked of her runaway, so much more thrilling. And that hotel adventure she is so full of, why the same thing—only a thousand times more exciting—happened to our own Cousin Mary Matilda. And can exhausted nature bear it again, and murdered in the telling—the encounter between the ladies Robinson

and Strangeways, that happened on your own back gallery?

We are companions in misfortune. People have a way of telling Jane and me, too, things we told them.

And as there is nothing as seductive as reform (we all know, if we begin to clear up a single drawer, enthusiasm spurs us on till every room in the house is turned upside down by night, and the family is dining in the back yard), I have decided that, in my rehabilitation, I will go further than simply keeping perfectly silent. I will control the restless gesture and the wandering eye. You know, chaste and pure as is dumbness, one is not entirely satisfied with the irresponsiveness of a stone pillar. Vanity has a thousand antennæ, and though of course the spoken word is always an interruption, as the gourd craves water, we long for sympathy, and especially the other sex demands it from us. What we should give is the flushed cheek, the glittering eye, the long, deep-drawn breath. There is an eloquence of the body in which neither the tongue nor lips have part. And, reader, if you are under the impression that a man's definition of a brilliant woman talker changes with the times, I am bound to tell you that, for the first time in your life, you are mistaken. His true definition will always be: "*She is very pleasantly felt.*"

But although what I am about to say breaks the brilliant conversationalist's rule of silence, the friend

in whom I have the most implicit confidence tells me that she has found the following suggestions most helpful. When the person has been talking to you a long time, and the constant murmur has become like the humming of bees or the continuous roll of surf on a low-lying beach,—when you are, in a word, what a detractor would call sleepy,—then, should your entertainer pull you up with a jerk and say, “What do you think?” repeat the question. Ask it very slowly, as if afraid to give so important a query an instant and thoughtless reply, and repeat, “What do I think?” Ten to one, this is a ruse on her part to find out your mental condition; and being satisfied that she has mesmerised you, she will go on; but at any rate the sophistry will give your faculties time to rally, and you will find the trail.

Jane in her would-be sarcastic manner tells me that, after having given so many receipts for being a good talker, it is now time for me to suggest what militates against this art.

Well, I suppose it must be admitted that nobody likes to receive information in conversation, and that it is safe to take for granted that everybody knows everything but personal gossip; and that all one’s audience wants is caustic comment.

A wise conversationalist will avoid referring to eventful circumstances in which he or she participated. People who were in the Ischia earthquake tell me that they have never regained their position in

society since that experience. They are suspected of wanting to tell about it. And a poor lady who was in the Union Depot explosion in New York, and had consoled herself with the reflection that now she had something to talk about, says she has never been able to get further than the announcement that she had been whirled against a stone wall. I know that when her eyes reproached Jane with having no intellectual curiosity, the latter was ready with the well-sounding, but specious remark, "I like to read about what happens, rather than to listen to one who participated in some event; because, when I read, I can think more clearly for myself."

For myself, I believe that Jane's conduct was the result of the dull resentment one suffers when a friend has had an experience denied us, and that she felt toward the poor woman as one does when one comes across a line quoted in a tongue with which one is not acquainted.

The most tiresome of all talkers is he who worries a subject to death. Selden, prince of conversationalists, threw out a hint, shot a Parthian dart and passed. His talk was not exhaustive, but suggestive.

In Mr. McGregor's "Life of Gladstone," he mentions that one afternoon on board a yacht, the following were his topics of conversation: "shoeblacks, crossing sweepers, Sherlock Holmes, Refuge Field Lane, Return of the Jews to Palestine, copper ore, Canada, bridges, ventilation, Ecce Homo, language

of sound, Dr. Wolff's travels, the use of the word scrupulous, marginal notes on Scripture, and a letter from a young man."

Not to be beaten in experiences by an obsequious Scotchman, I will remark that on one occasion, in his mother's drawing-room, a small, toothless American boy looked me in the face and put these questions with not a breath between: "What is the difference between the characters of Xenophon and Aristotle? What is the meaning of 'stock on change'? What is the effect of water poured from a precipitate distance upon hot rocks? What is the meaning of 'oats, small and weak'? What is 'the basis of ethics'?"

Will anyone deny that a mind which jumps like this from valley to craig is more interesting than one which bores like a worm, a tiny point deep down into the centre of the earth?

Then from an intellectual, not a moral, standpoint, no talker is entertaining who does not make the listener believe what he says. When you tell me indeed that you are the author of "Beautiful Snow," while your grandpapa wrote the Junius Letters, there is no shock to my credulity. Since they have taken away from me my Lucretia Borgia, and given me in the place of the fascinating poisoner, an exemplary housewife, whose only fault was a too austere piety and a lack of discrimination in her choice of healthy husbands, you can work your will

on me in the matter of history. But when you describe costumes I am morally certain you do not possess, when you tell me that your oriental lamp was sent you by an admirer from the Far East, after I myself have chattered for it in a domestic shop window; above all, when you relate conversations that you assure me have taken place between yourself and, say, Mr. Arthur Balfour, when you were the guest of crowned heads in Europe last summer, I do not believe you, and you bore me for this reason. You have, in these witty and (to yourself) most flattering talks, mirrored your own person, not that of the Premier. When Hans Andersen tells the conversation between the dog and the cat apropos of the two human lovers, he makes the dog say: "And he [the man] said to her [the woman], 'Come and live with me in my kennel and we will gnaw the same bone.'"

Now, as expressive and able as is your language in relating these conversations, Mr. Balfour does not, speaking with respect, converse as does the dog or the cat; but you have imitated a great though inferior genius and made him talk like a man, as Lewis Carroll makes the Dormouse and the Rabbit talk. Unless he was mocking you, and that idea I reject, he did not say he "hoped you'd have a good time" in London. I am the last person to believe that statesmen know anything about the laws of their country. Only the other day a cousin of my brother-in-law, a

person without social advantages and imperfect education, having lived all her life with the prospect of dying on a Virginia plantation, went to a dinner party in Washington. The Senator who took her in to dinner was tanked up with inaccurate information about the illiteracy of the whites and the superior native ability of the nē-groes, and naturally wished to irrigate her dusty mind with facts of which she was not ignorant. But he did not know his man. She faced about, looked him in the eye, and pelted him with fragments of the Constitution. The rest is silence. So it was not necessary for you to say that Mr. Balfour talked the education bill or the attack on Lord Lansdowne. But you must make him talk English, not American, make him himself, not you. "Indeed, my Lord," said Ophelia to Hamlet, "you made me believe it," and would you interest me, this is your task. "She had a low cunning," says Lady Mary Wortley Montagu of Queen Caroline, "which gave her an inclination to cheat all people she conversed with. And she often cheated herself, not having understanding enough to observe that all falsehoods, like red on the face, must be used sparingly or they destroy the interest they are designed to heighten."

And, I suppose, just here one might venture to say: Be sparing of the anecdote, though a good anecdote is like an apt illustration in a book of travels. When the Swedish novelist Björnsen was

in this country, he was once the guest of a popular club where a brilliant speaker got up and told a side-splitting story. Björnsen laughed. He told another. Björnsen smiled. A third. The novelist sat in gloomy silence. "But it was very good," chided his mentor, "why didn't you laugh?"

"I am forty years old," said Björnsen, "and two stories are enough."

Another suggestion: Instead of the old-fashioned "That reminds me," the conversationalist should have a friend in the audience who will bring the conversation around to an opening for the story. But a friend is not always trustworthy; he has, in a moment of overwhelming temptation, been known to tell the tale himself. But a wife is generally to be relied on for, to be frank, we have so often been told that we "left out the point, let me tell it," that we have become diffident of our powers as raconteurs. This secondary position seems, however, particularly suited to the moderate female ambition and I am told by an admiring wife that when she has brought the talk to the place where she can mention in an offhand way, "George, do tell that amusing thing I heard you telling last night," she has the feeling of partnership of a bellows-blower when the musician executes the Moonlight Sonata.

Gossip mingled with mimicry is always an acceptable element of conversation. There is something in the discussion of the personal that excites the jaded

interest. And, strange to say, the people who are in themselves most dull, are entertaining when subject to absent treatment.

For instance: Jane and I have a relation whose point of view is, "Shirt waists, to button or not to button, shall it be three or five?" When she makes us one of her not-rare visits, Jane is compelled to study her Scripture lesson, and I hear the telephone, calling me to Catonsville to see a dying friend.

But when that most amusing Maude comes over and reproduces my relation, even to the set of her prim little lips, I would not want better company.

It is food for thought, this; how much more entertaining we are when presented through the medium of another mind.

My idea of a conversationalist is a young man who was in a summer hotel with us last July: a loud-voiced youth with a hearty "Good-morning" manner. At the Soldiers' Fair one night—none but the brave deserve the fair—he came in late to supper. "All the youth and beauty have gone," said the Baltimore girl with her warm Southern smile, "there's nothing left for you but the plain and elderly." "Well, then, come on," and he held out a waiting arm. And when someone was inveighing against stupid people in general, in which our young gentleman heartily concurred, and the curtain dropped, disclosing a lady who was reading in the adjoining room, he rushed forward, all blushes and

remorse: "Oh," he implored, "oh, I am sure I beg your pardon."

The guarded utterance of the New Englander is as delightful as the odour extracted from sweet fern, that understatement that is the American's pre-eminent gift. I had a slow-moving acquaintance with a large body and mind encased in adipose tissue. He did not like people to ask him questions, and one day he came to me to relate a grievance. A lady with intellectual curiosity had, it seems, asked him how much rent he got for his town house. "And how often do you suppose she asked me?" He had looked out of the window when she had made her earliest interrogation. The expectations of Janet's mamma rose high. "Seven, twice seven." I guessed the mystical numbers and with the ineradicable belief of one woman in the capacity of another woman to ferret out a secret, I would have hazarded seventy times seven, but he held up a fat finger. "She asked me twice."

But best of all, I believe I like the way one woman sometimes talks to another woman under the guise of perfect civility. It was once my privilege to hear a lady from Virginia recount to a lady from Maryland the social triumphs of her son at Newport in the season. "Didn't he, though, dear Mrs. Carter-Braxton-Randolph, didn't he feel the least bit out of place, a little embarrassed?"

"Embarrassed, my son embarrassed among fur-

riers, and carpet makers, and real estate agents and miners? Yes, I think he was, but he is a gentleman and did not make them feel it."

And, yes, he presses them hard,—the young man from Maine who had been to college and was full up to his tonsils with undigested material,—a raw, ignorant, yearning youth who comes down South, He is a class, and wants to "inquire into your conditions." I saw him last year, on a Southern plantation, and at the dinner table he made himself agreeable to his hostess.

"Was there not great degradation during the time of slavery?"

"Oh, no! they had not been vitiated by reading Miss Corelli or even Mrs. Besant," replied my friend, "they were a very simple, childlike people." "But I didn't mean the nē-groes," he responded thoughtfully, "to them slavery might have been a helpful experience. I mean was it not degrading to you?"

Well, talking is a gift like another, is born, not made.

I can produce, if called upon, a cousin, little better in capacity than an idiot, but whose adventures, related by her, excel those of Stevenson, and whose naïveté equals that of Sterne. And then, but I hope you will not demand his society, I have a friend who can understand "The Wings of a Dove," and even "What Maisie Knew," and is not entertaining. Sometimes I am almost inclined to think that to be

an agreeable conversationalist one must be a trifle dull. "Don't forget," says Sydney Smith, "to put in the dough, it's the making of the finest confectionery." And when I say this I have in mind an old gentleman, who is not clever, but in whom a sort of radiance of benevolence accentuates his kind, cheerful words, and an old woman, too wise to let her discussions of past events, pregnant with wit and sarcasm, degenerate into gossip, but who listens, with a lovely courtesy and a most beautiful deference that almost makes what we say worth while.

VIII

Mannerisms in Conversation

IF I could convince people that the secret of conversation is silence and intelligent gesture, of course all that I am going to say would be superfluous; but since certain individuals insist on talking, I will warn you that there are little mannerisms that make the task of listener unnecessarily difficult. For instance: there is a trick of speech that is so universal that, fatal as it is to conversation, we seldom place it till we experience a certain undefinable weariness after a talk with certain persons. When we tell a story, we are not content to tell it once, we tell it twice, and does the slightest applause follow, we again repeat, adding fresh emphasis as we reach the climax.

Of course, reader, you will say that whereas you have your faults, in which noble and almost incredible confession, I find it hard to agree with you, this is not one of them, although you have deplored the habit in your dearest friend.

But a strict scrutiny of your conduct the next time you repeat one of little Billy's smart sayings,

will, I think, reveal to you that the first time of telling was only a preparation,—watering the soil, so to speak,—while you hardly expect full appreciation before it has been related at least three times. Observation will, however, inform you that whereas dull persons seldom take in any news at first, the idea reaches them when repeated; and if it is told again vanity revolts.

When, to illustrate, you, with proper dramatic setting, inform me that Bobby, aged three, said he knew it was five o'clock because the little bird in the maple tree was saying, "tee, tee," surprise and admiration may so paralyse my powers that I am unable to appreciate it. But when you are good enough to recognise this, and repeat "Yes, he pointed with his little finger, and said" (giving me the not unfamiliar information), my faculties have had time to rally, and I can nod and smile. But when you mistake my polite and sympathetic applause for bewilderment, and tell me again, I detest the little angel for a bore, and you for an inventor.

And there is another menace to story-telling that one may as well be prepared for. We all have a certain set of anecdotes that are a part of our social outfit. But as a wary woman makes the same costumes do for recurring seasons by warming them over, and then taking them to different places each year; so one must guard against repeating the same story to the same people. But this glib advice is not

easily acted upon. The same people suggest the same topics. We all remember that when Dr. Holmes, most versatile of talkers, went in his youth to the Far West, he met a lady to whom he made a rather obvious witticism,—how, thirty years passed, he revisited the town, saw the same lady, and made the same speech. The speech had in fact been dedicated to her. Neither before nor afterwards had he ever made it. So it is with the writer. Whenever I see Matilda, though the years lie between our interviews, I find myself telling with zest the particulars of my visit to Ouida. My other friends know that I have my bag bursting with amusing reminiscences, but poor Matilda has little opportunity to form that opinion. Somehow, little as they are alike, Matilda suggests to me Ouida. I think you had better look yourself over, though investigation may result in wounds to a particularly sensitive quality.

In that very clever study of character, "Tristram Lacy," by Mallock, Mrs. Norham, the apostle of reform, has a trick of holding her head on one side and looking upward. This mannerism had met with no consideration at home or in the intellectual ranks in which she moved, but upon a day it happened that she met the Premier, Lord Runcorn, and his sister in a railway carriage. Lady Cornelia Leighton, who was of another world, was quite fascinated with the unusual posture; and when they parted, the Delphic pythoness heard her remark to her illustrious

brother: "I like that trick she has of looking upward and with her head a little on one side. One sees something like it in the pictures of old saints." That night when the apostle of reform had returned to her own humble dwelling, where she had gathered a little flock about her, she bore her head like a broken lily; so easy is it to exaggerate a virtue, as can be seen in people who colour their faces to perfection the first month, but are like a signboard the second. So the upward glance and the distorted neck, instead of evoking commendation, called forth the following remark from Mrs. Bousefield—a lady who represented the common sense of the disciples: "Mrs. Norham," said this direct person, "Mrs. Norham, I hope ye've not suffered from sitting in those foreign railway carriages. I've noticed you hold your head a little on one side. If your neck is stiff, I'll give ye a cold compress."

So there is a certain underlying animosity of sex between ladies that requires me to warn you against these affectations. I suppose that under heaven's canopy there is no task as difficult as for one female to deceive another female, and, it is fair to say, we easily withstand each other's fascinations, but not so with the sex that, after all, is our natural prey.

I known three sisters who married often and early because they had a hesitation in their speech. I knew a lady who secured a comfortable home by the

habit of fainting and being carried out upon stalwart shoulders. There is a family on the Eastern Shore of Maryland who open and shut their eyes, after the manner of expensive wax dolls, and with such effect that they are to the male what the basilisk is to the frog. And if these anecdotes are not sufficiently convincing, I have others—such as that of the lady who was asked in marriage by several gentlemen (for where one pastures, others will follow) though she was neither rich nor beautiful, because she was affected with a trembling of the lids.

In my inmost heart, I believe this trembling to have been the result of disease, but it was unusual, and after a while what was queer began to be looked upon as valuable.

At any rate, a well-established, portly lady, married to a man who secured her not without difficulty, has only one sorrow in a sheltered life—the necessity of keeping up the girlish habit which secured her her agreeable surroundings. Her husband is not a sentimentalist, but he wants what he paid for. He married his wife because her eyelids trembled, and not unnaturally he wishes to be possessed of his treasure.

The disease which occasioned my poor friend's peculiarity having been cured, she can look as straight as you or I, but her punishment is to continue to have trembling lids. At least in the presence of her lord, she must assume the trick by which

she won him; and I, for one, will not affirm that to be obliged to be affected before one's family, is not a trial. And when the partner of her joys looks for this inherited trait in each daughter, and wonders why Bertha or Madelaine has not this pretty habit. Jane and I look at each other, and with difficulty suppress the desire to improve the occasion.

Therefore let it be understood that these mannerisms are for the nonce, and the object once attained, they may be discarded as the saurian reptile sheds his skin.

All is fair in love, and one may sputter or blink or swoon away, just as one practises the trick of putting on a grenadier's cap; but the prey once captured, one should be allowed to don one's dressing-gown and slippers for life.

And there is yet another mannerism, which even we, accustomed as we are to it, find provoking, and (it is with mortification we confess) it obtains in our own select, blooded portion of the republic. Nor can it be pleaded that it is adopted for the praiseworthy purpose of establishing one's self in life, as may be urged for stammerers, or swooners, or even blinkers. It is not even a means of getting into good society, such as induced the altruistic Mrs. Norham to bow her classic head. Southern women, even those whose fate is fixed, use the rising inflection when they would make a statement, and in consequence all conversation is a draft upon the sympathy.

Two women will meet and the talk run after this fashion.

“And then I went down?” Listener: “Yes?”
“And furs are so debilitating?” Listener: “Yes?”
“So I came home?” Listener: “Yes?” “But decided not to take them off?” Listener: “Yes?”
“Because one is so apt to take cold?” Listener: “Yes, yes?” By this time all the air in the retort has been exhausted, and the second person in the dialogue has to take to beef tea and peptomangan.

The habit of uttering a commonplace in the form of a question has become so universal that it was with more pain than surprise, the other day, that I received the greeting, “The baby took its first walk yesterday?” And when this strain on the faculties was followed with, “And wore its little blue flannel wrapper?” the countenance of Janet’s mamma assumed so sheepish an air that she was thankful that the photographer was not present to hand her blushing features down to posterity.

But probably the most cunning of all ruses to keep the conversation in one’s own hands is that used by your and my acquaintance. She is a woman who in an unending stream of platitudes fixes the person addressed as if the latter were a fly and she an infant Benedict Arnold with a pin. And the instrument of torture is an “and er.” But lately I sat for a wretched half-hour while the fountain at the same time flowed forth “summer outing,” “fall

clothes," "tomato catsup," "the new church tenor," "moths," and "the children's school." But for the "and ers," an agile person might have jumped in at the falling inflection which, as the well-taught are aware, marks a period. But when the converser connects "homemade yeast" and inductive philosophy with a footbridge like this, there is no jumping in.

IX

Ignorance Is Bliss

IN my unqualified praise of ignorance, I am confronted by a complaint urged by those whom I hope to influence.

With the best disposition in the world to be ignorant, they say that all their acquaintances are so learned that they absorb knowledge, and through mere atmospheric effect drink in things that give them the appearance of being clever, when they are really not so. Not definite knowledge, it is true—rather the sort which places the Parthenon in the centre of Rome, and the Pantheon on the heights above Athens, and moans the sins of the impeccable Plato, when they are really criticising the conduct of the god of the underworld—knowledge that causes them to be included in the ranks of the instructed, and puts on their shoulders the burdens of the learned.

Now, to be a fool carries with it a reproach. With all prejudice in favour of ignorance, I must go so far as to admit that much ; but, after mature deliberation, I have come to the conclusion that it is an almost in-

tolerable burden to assume the rôle of one involved in high affairs of culture and worldly wisdom, because, in so doing, one is cut off from the candid expression of opinion.

Of course I do not know how it is with you, but for my part, I would willingly exchange my international fame regarding, well, I will say my ability to decipher Egyptian inscriptions—for that reputation for weak-mindedness that would enable me, under its cover, to tell a certain intimate enemy what I think of her parlour furniture.

She who for vanity or duty's sake puts herself under the yoke has been known to dislocate her jaws while reading Milton's prose, and I have a friend with the highest repute for telling necessary social fibs, who confided in me that it is with the greatest difficulty that she refrains from blurting out such awful truths as: "Your bonnet is a fright," and "Thank Heaven, I was out when you called."

Between friends, then, what would your high standing as a follower of William Morris, and a purchaser of "mission furniture" be worth to you, in comparison with the joy of freedom to be out with: "How I hate those Botticellis—long, lank things with hideous faces," or that other sincere utterance: "I'm sick to death of moth-eaten Persian rugs, all faded out and with holes in them"; and that bold expression: "I perfectly hate that fugue of Bach—

I'd rather have bees buzzing in my ears"? And (I assure you it will go no farther) would you not cheerfully resign the anticipated poster of three dancing girls in lemon-yellow jumping back and forth over a slow fire—an impressionist gem which your mother-in-law, who is spending the winter in Paris, has intimated will be her gift to you for the coming Christmas, for the pure pleasure of going downtown with a friend of opinions like your own, and buying a bright Brussels rug, with a dog on it rescuing a child from drowning?

No educated person could, under any circumstances, of course, know the rapture of this unloosing of steel and cordage, this emerging from mental and artistic restrictions, but once an acknowledged ignoramus, and draped in the flag of artlessness, punctilious observance of rules slides from the laden shoulders, and in our own guileless way we may discard the blue Canton china, and buy French with pink roses on it, and mention to our sister-in-law what we think of Tommy's manners, and the formation of Ethel's features.

Frankness, so delightful to practise, so impossible to submit to, is the prerogative of the ignorant. "Angry with Jane!" remarks that connection by marriage, whose darlings have been reflected on, and whom high-mindedness requires to "smile and think of something pleasant," "Why, certainly not—that irresponsible, silly little thing!" But Jane can tell

another tale; the reproach of ignorance is well worth incurring for the delight of freeing one's mind.

Ignorance of foreign languages is a gift that can hardly be overestimated. There are conservative people who advise the traveller to learn "I don't understand you" in three continental languages, but I would not go so far. I would admit nothing. Helplessness I have already recommended in gilt letters, but helplessness with ignorance will bring her who is so endowed to the very pinnacle of success.

Only lately one of our friends went abroad, a lady who weighed two hundred pounds and possessed a modest sum of spending money. But she was equipped with a fund of ignorance that put to the blush our small change of school-girl French—a language which we all read with facility, but when it comes to speaking we find ourselves somewhat embarrassed and surprised that in the lapse of years we have lost that purely Parisian accent which was the delight of the mademoiselle to whom our education was confided. With her ignorance our friend was encumbered with no silly pride. She took it all "very sweetly and very simply," as Mr. Howells would say, and, though understanding no tongue but her own, did understand that when she had paid for a second-class ticket, and then seated herself in a first-class chair, though that little uniformed and bemedalled French official sang an old and moving story, to

which she listened with a flitting blush, with down-cast eyes and modest grace, he was powerless to effect her locomotion. If one does not comprehend, one is not a subject for argument; and when it came, by way of keeping an inflexible rule, to casting two hundred pounds of good American avoirdupois into the English Channel, the regulations were relaxed.

To be sure, my friend inferred from the sulphurous atmosphere that she had excited anger, and it may be scorn; but upon that obtuse intelligence, those uncomplimentary gestures dropped like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. To be sure, she felt, even through her armour of ignorance, that she was despised; but what sensible person would care for the ill opinion of people she had never seen before, and would likely never see again, when it was a choice between their admiration, and a ten-franc piece, and a comfortable journey? We all worship in others the traits in which we are most lacking, and our well-known subserviency to public opinion, perhaps, induces us to reverence too highly a friend's calm indifference to what people think. But it will be admitted that this skilful avoidance of a provoking and unnecessary extortion could not have been accomplished, had our traveller been possessed of even a store of "rusty" learning. It was unadulterated ignorance that brought her through.

Jane and I entertain such particular ideas about matrimony that I really hesitate to use them as a

final argument in my recommendation of ignorance, but this is the fact. Ignorance in woman is to the masculine mind contemplating, what molasses is to the fickle and errant fly. Men say they are afraid of clever girls because they are too smart for them, an admission that in its absolute veracity would gratify the soul of the philosopher, who, in despair of finding truth, has declared it to be in a well; and the coward flees to the soft admiring eyes of her who will not put him to shame by talking about "materialism," or dye his cheeks with blushes by asking his opinion of M. Brunetière's recent article on "The American Spirit."

Nor is this avoidance of the learned lady confined to people who have been to college and played on the football team. The professor of sociology will say of the Senior Wrangler: "She is very able, but she lacks the childlike spirit. Some people arrive at conclusions by intuition, not through the dry medium of text-books." This is in excuse for his running off to spend his afternoons with a girl named Daisy who has a small, impertinent nose, and whose "intuitions," so far from leading her to know how to spell "separate" or "until," shut in her face the gates of the first grammar grade on silver hinges turning.

And does one remonstrate, and urge that Crichton would find in the Senior Wrangler a congenial soul; that they could talk about logarithms all the morning,

and pass the evening discussing the existence of matter; that in a glance she would know a dado from a frieze, and chicken from turkey, no matter how ancient and well developed the former fowl; he would reply with this remarkably well-sounding sentence: "The woman to whom I have given my affections has far higher spiritual enlightenment than either the Senior Wrangler or even myself." In fact, so well is it established that clever men marry silly women that our Janet has refused a rising young lawyer, lest her intellect be reflected upon, and is encouraging a young man, whose constant habit of telegraphing instead of writing, with other ominous signs, has excited the suspicion, in the minds of Janet and me, that knowledge of the three "Rs" is not one of his accomplishments.

Since, then, ignorance weds, and weds the savants, the statesmen, the judges, while graduates of Bryn Mawr wed mediocrity, it becomes a question, "Will you live alone, or with one who is acknowledged to be your inferior, or will you despise logarithms and French materialism, and content yourself with vicarious acquirements, and the reputation of him whose qualifications are, after all, more a matter of pride to you than your own?"

Mrs. Oliphant, whose opinion of men was poor, made one of her heroines an idiot, on the principle that, as so small a degree of intelligence fascinated the other sex, none at all would be completely floor-

ing. "Innocent," you remember, had two lovers, and proved so attractive to the judge that when she was tried before him for murder, that dignitary changed his harsh and guttural tones to those of a cooing dove, and she left the court proved, indeed, to have administered a poisoned draught to a lady whom she disliked, but free, and the "recipient of," as the newspapers say, a graceful tribute to her engaging absence of mind.

I do not take so extreme a view of the fascinations of imbecility. I would prefer my James to unite himself with one possessed of a reasonable, but uncultivated, intellect; and could I choose a wife for this somewhat priggish, but unexceptionally correct, young gentleman, I would whisper a word in her ear: "Let your comprehension of the simplest problem come from him. When he alludes to Plato, ask him if he was a nice man?" And you may drop a remark concerning his wife, Xanthippe, and pity him that she was a scold. James, with a large and patient benevolence, will set you right as to who was the legal possessor of that handsome virago, and what is more, you will become aware by a most compromising utterance, that he is not making a formal call.

X

The Motive of Travel

IN my opinion it was great luck on Othello's part that he ever got the chance to mention to Desdemona the "antres vast and deserts idle," the "anthropophagi" and the men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders. If she had not been the girl she was, a maiden of spirit, so still and quiet that her motion blushed at itself, Desdemona would never have sat in the corner and let him tell his adventures. She would have broken in at the first moving accident by flood and field and made him listen, while she told where she spent the summer, and how she got her best hat wet at the picnic. Or, she would have interrupted with:

"My noble Sir, one Michael Cassio,
Lieutenant to your warlike captaincy, did come
ashore,

He has had hairbreadth 'scapes i' the imminent
deadly breach,

Met the high seas and 'brest the howling winds."

And if Othello had even so much as alluded to

being taken captive by the insolent foe, the lady would have cut him off at the knees with :

“Within the leaves of a great folio—I have *read*
a tale,
Of guttered rocks and congregated sands,
Traitors ensteeped to clog the guiltless keel——”

Of course it is a matter of individual opinion, but for myself, I have never considered the Moor utterly unfortunate. He had his ups and downs like another, and discovered, when it was too late, that he had thrown away a pearl of a woman who, if pearl stands for rarity, well deserved the title, for she allowed him on his pilgrimage to dilate, but not intently. But at least he had not all his travels' history for nothing.

I speak with bitterness, but an Elizabeth of Hungary would speak with bitterness, if she had suffered my experience.

At great expense and with much personal discomfort, I had just taken a trip to the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, but, though scenery, especially the scenery of my own country, is especially interesting to me, I cannot say that, had I promised to go secretly and under vow not to mention where I had been or what I had seen, the journey had been taken. Would Thoreau have lived his hermit life in the Concord woods, had not his solitude been sweetened

with the thought that Margaret Fuller and Emerson were filling the world with praises of his love of seclusion? Did not the very martyrs find it less hard to die under the glare of the Roman sunshine and the gaze of the wondering multitude, in the great amphitheatre, than in some lonely cell, where their very courage was looked down upon by unseeing walls?

Well, the surpassingly beautiful region was visited, we got home, and Janet's mamma attempted to pour out her experiences upon the household of a neighbour, of whose respectful attention she was sure in consideration of the presence at a recent entertainment of a valuable *épergne* lent them for that occasion. What, then, were her feelings when the eldest son of the family, a solemn, consequential person, who confined his own outings to Druid Hill Park Sunday afternoons, snatched the words out of the traveller's mouth, and with great eagerness and no lack of dull detail, told what a friend of his had seen on the same trip? There I sat, all my thunder stolen, while the creature retailed, not his own expensive and arduous journey, but that of another and an absent voyager. And when I would have ventured a word of correction, or perhaps an addendum, my remarks were received with a shake of the head and a depreciatory—"Perhaps so, but Bangs didn't tell it that way, and Bangs is a man

who is apt to take in all the show wherever he sees it."

When the interminable evening was over, Janet's mamma vowed a vow. In future her journeyings should be from the blue bed to the brown, like those of the Vicar of Wakefield's wife, and if ever again she were tempted to take a trip across the continent that cost five hundred dollars, she would remember that young man and his cheap way of getting attention, and let her friend Bangs do the sight-seeing.

It was while smarting under this experience that I succeeded, though with the exercise of strategy, in persuading an old friend to give me her attention while I related it. But I did not even have the poor satisfaction of feeling that even this episode in my career was unique. She took some time about it, my poor friend, and she also found in me an auditor who showed symptoms of restlessness, but it finally came out that the summer before she had had a carriage accident and fractured her skull. After all her pains, she hoped to extract what balm she could from the wound and naturally expected the distinction accruing from misfortune. But she did not know this world. No sooner did she begin to open her lips to recount the horror when every woman in the room dashed in upon the narration with a tragedy of her own, before the enormity of which, her simple little skull fracture, by an upset over a precipice, shrank to dimensions so small that you would

have had to put it under a microscope to see it. And if, by ill luck, an unfortunate was present who had not been saved by the interposition of the angels themselves in their own persons, she was not cast down by that. Fate had supplied her with a relative who had undergone the worst. More, if an unscrupulous Providence had denied her this boon, like the women who describe surgical operations of which they have read, she too sought distinction from the pages of literature. My acquaintance tells me that one woman made her listen to a carriage accident that she had gleaned from a three-volume novel, and that, while she was extracting this plum, she took occasion to relate the intricate plot. The listener went to her own house, more than ever determined never again to risk her life in the hope of exciting interest in herself among her friends. In fact, though she does not like to read, she has almost resolved to take to that triste resource, and, when she would claim an audience, cull her adventures from a romance.

Jane sometimes reproaches me with a desire to probe the situation and find out just how bad things are. Whatever my motive, I will give you the benefit of an experiment. We went to Europe, passed the summer, and when nearing our native city, we made this arrangement: we would visit our friends in a circle, and we would make no reference to our foreign trip, but wait for some one of them to make

inquiries. We would let the hostess put the opening questions: "Where have you been?" "What have you seen?" "Tell us something of your travels?"

Our first call was on an old friend. She met us with hearty greetings; was delighted to see us, had missed us all summer, and wished we had gone to a place called "Bute's," a railway station on the Pennsylvania road. Here we were asked to enjoy vicariously a colonial tea party and a fair, gotten up to build a monument to a—well, it was a monument and a fair. My friend was not clear whom the wood and stone idol were to commemorate, but the fair was graven in letters of gold. When we were leaving she asked—as if the last drop of personal interest had been squeezed when she put the lagging question—whether we had found it hot in town.

Our next venture was upon an eager, enthusiastic creature, who had been to the Buffalo Exposition during our absence. She was good enough to describe the electric display, and I really believe that if I knew my devotions as well as I have come to know how the light came up on the lake, and the flush reddened the sky, and the band played "Nearer my God to Thee," while there was not a dry eye on the beach—if, as I said, either Jane or I could ever attain to the glibness in these exercises that is ours concerning this daily phenomenon, neither of us, in our old age, would be left naked to our enemies.

But it is right to say that we got no chance to water arid fields with our own clear stream. For all of Hattie Daws, we might as well not have slept out in that hut near the Mer de Glace to see the sunrise on the snow-clad mountains. When she said good-bye, she hazarded—"Well, I suppose you spent your summer as usual, with your Aunt Caroline down in Nottaway." "I am more than ever determined to take no further trouble for people," said Jane bitterly. "Next summer I *will* go to see Aunt Caroline and let Hattie Daws spend her money in Europe." But it is right to mention that, in making this impetuous plan, Jane had not reckoned with our Aunt Caroline.

Then another thing. I have found that, whereas, a proposed trip to one's relations, who live deep in the country, does not give offence, the idea of crossing the water, when entertained by a friend, are we ourselves going to "a quiet place for rest," has an inflaming effect, and tends to the decrease of popularity. I mentioned on one occasion, to a lady who was a patron of the arts and to whom I looked for sympathy, that I expected to pass the month of July in Rome. "Well!" she exclaimed, her eyes full of compassion, "I do indeed pity you! Rome? In hot weather? The fever! The mosquitoes! The dirt!" And then I think this good woman made a mistake. If she had only stopped just here, content to have plunged two

enthusiastic persons from a giddy height of pleasurable anticipation to a sandbank on the coast of North Carolina, all had been well, but she would not let well enough alone—and there you are. “I myself am going to stay right here this summer,” she said. “I need the time to digest all I have read and heard; but my grandmother is going to England next month—for the climate.” Speaking with respect, she should not have said it. She had no grandmother, and though there are circumstances when it is permissible to invent one, such as a desire to become a Colonial Dame, or to marry into the Virginia aristocracy, I do not think that this was the occasion to unearth her. Jane and I experienced pleasurable emotions, produced by one angry and without weapons proper to inflict upon us serious wounds.

Should one, then, travel? One should travel as one takes small doses of strychnine, not for the momentary effect, but for the general health. One should see things for the sake of others, but it should be done tactfully, as one gives presents at Christmas, not in one’s own person, but through Santa Claus. An ingenious being might let out, under severe provocation, that he had climbed the highest point of the Himalaya range, but it should be done to aid another in the purchase of snowshoes, or a camping outfit. The disclosure should never take place unless that other is in need of advice which will disarm his resentment, occasioned by the fact that what he

is going to undertake has already been attempted successfully.

Still there is a way of journeying that is for our own sakes and yet for the sake of others, and it does not wound or irritate. It was described to us at twilight, the receptive hour, and by a quiet person, who has herself a sort of inward brightness, that is not of the sun, but an inferior quality, like that which sleeps in the soft hues of an Eastern rug. Two or three years ago, she said, a young girl whom she knew, a creature all fire and dew, alive in every nerve of her strong young body, loving the earth, the sea, the sky—all the beautiful things in which the ardent soul may steep itself—this young girl found that she was growing blind. From the first it was hopeless, but the decay of vision was slow, comparatively. As soon as she realised her doom, she went to a specialist and bade him tell her how long it would be before she was to take her last look on the dear, green earth. "In about a year." With that assurance she made her plan. She went to Europe, and there she passed the twelve short months in patient memorising of pictures, scenery, architecture, fixing on the retina of her mind the highest expression of the sculptor's and the painter's genius, and of nature in her loveliest moods; not surfeiting her spirit or fatiguing her body, but quietly, without haste, without restlessness, imprinting on her very soul the

memories which were to fill the granaries of that soul against the famine. This strange, pathetic gathering of the summer driftwood for the winter fire occupied all her waiting hours. We can fancy her gazing down the Chamouni valley, with the sun shining on the iridescent snows, or stopping to look long, tenderly, on the loveliness of the Greek theatre at Taormina. And so they passed, but not in vain repining, all the dear, full days. And when the darkness fell, it is consoling to think that the sweet eyes looked their last upon the face they loved best, the flower they loved best, the scene where she had deepest drunk of joy. For myself, I cannot but believe that on that fond and faithful gaze were photographed the outlines most dear, and that in after years, she will have but to love dearly and wish ardently, to see them all again. And now, so my friend told us in the twilight, though months have passed in which she has dwelt in total physical gloom, this young girl preserves her bright serenity. Its secret is a mind stored with lovely impressions. Her memory is a gallery hung with the treasures of nature and of art. And when she would look upon them, she has only to recall the last patient year, when, like the Lady of Shalott, she was weaving her web.

XI

Love's Catechism

I SELDOM go over the list of my married acquaintances without thinking how much better I would have been to them than the providence who presides over their fortunes. I was saying something like this to Jane,—regretting that H—— hadn't married his wife's sister or her intimate friend instead of the person whose outward attraction consists in looking like a rabbit,—when I was interrupted by the remark: "The success of a marriage must be decided from the point of view. It is not how you, in your omniscience, look at it; it is how they themselves regard it, that is important. Besides, if you give him time, H—— will marry the younger sister, and perhaps also the intimate friend."

When Jane makes well-sounding remarks like this, I prepare to hear her say something different, and this is what she said:

"Women are so much more practical than men—so much less romantic—have so much more common sense that, but for the silly custom that requires them

to be chosen instead of making a choice, there would be few disastrous marriages. No woman really does make a choice, you know. Her parents urge her on, or a friend manufactures a halo round his head. For myself, I may be singular in this respect, but for myself, I never considered it as making a choice when frantic people with pistols in their pockets and threatening suicide offered us marriage. And so I can't help deploring that it is all as it is." Jane has steel-grey eyes, and when they are darkened with pity or regret, it is like looking into a violet's depths.

We were both thinking of people we love, of that vibrant human creature with the beautiful, grateful eyes. She was made to comfort, to sustain; and her capacity for happiness would have overflowed her own home, into the street, into the world.

She is not even now, in her sorry straits, a bad woman; but she is not a very good one. One cannot palliate and excuse and finally defend what is evil in one we love, and suffer no change. She would do a friend and even an enemy a splendid, self-immolating service, and she would pluck the feathers out of her breast for the children and for Harry; but she is not what we would have planned for her, had we started her on her long journey. And there is Muriel, for whom I cannot wish a long life, hard as it is to see what is young and lovely sink powerless into that impenetrable darkness, that profound

silence. She is a tall and stately young person, who reminds me of Mademoiselle de Mersac, and whom, somehow, one expects to see in a pale primrose silk with steel ornaments on hair, neck, ears, flashing with every turn of the head, as Jeanne de Mersac was dressed the night of the ball. She has, like Jeanne, too, an undoubted presence, but she is not always the same thing. Sometimes her lips are curved in a smile of innocent candour, then a touch of disdain finds its way into the guileless sweetness. Sometimes, with her pale face, her drooped eyelids, that grave, inscrutable curve of her lips, she looks like the Mona Lisa. And her eyes can call, can laugh, can weep, or they can become stone, and sleep for days together.

Such a woman, wrapped in her maiden reverie, walking in the dreamy path of illusion, is not for love or life. She is going to be married to a keen, self-sufficient man of the world, who, after the regulation time, will go back to his commonplace life. In a month or two her dream will have faded, and she will come down to breakfast with a sad, it is possible, a reproachful countenance, which we all agree is the unpardonable sin.

I would not lift a finger to bring it about, but to Jane I have said, thinking of our Muriel, "There are worse things that can happen to us than an early death."

And Jane's seems a very trite, a very aged remark,

but men are much less fitted to choose for themselves than women are. Ten to one, a man's marriage comes by accident.

There is B——, the dreamer, sensitive, proud, with such acute perceptions that one likens him in the spiritual world to Thoreau in the world of nature. And so great is his charm that he might have married any of you. He could have lured you with his shepherd's lute and his rich, resonant voice, but it fell upon a day that he met a small, pale woman with a little mouth, and eyes which his poetic temperament found, as did the obdurate Paul in "Good-bye, Sweetheart," were those "of a shot partridge." I saw him walking yesterday under her watchful eye. She speaks of him as "*My husband*," and she were bold who would dispute it. Does he repeat poetry to her by the driftwood fire, as he had planned to do when he dreamed of love? Or take her long tramps over the quickened hills these soft April afternoons? If he had but listened to Jane and to me, who had seen her without her dotted veil, and in her close little boudoir that smelt of patchouli! But he did not listen, and now she turns away his eyes and hers, as is natural—the small exacting creature. . . He should not have married her. He should have married one I know who would have worshipped him and fended for him as she does for the poor soul whose helplessness moved her pity. Or, better still, he should have married Muriel, on

whose spirit he would have played like the wind through an æolian harp.

Jane said, and I agreed with her, that men are less fitted to choose a matrimonial partner than women; and yet, when we have gotten our proofs together, I am almost ashamed to present them. *Homo sum*, and though this is only in a sense true, I have a respect for humanity which prevents their being totally alien to me. For instance: I knew a man who married three sisters consecutively, and finally—I say “finally,” but who knows—married his wives’ first cousin. Someone, ignorant of his unique history, asked him if he had not married a “Miss Jones?” “I *always* marry a Miss Jones,” he replied with enthusiasm.

Another can’t resist the perils of propinquity, and marries the person, if of the opposite sex, who happens to sit next him at his boarding-house table. Or, from a manly spirit of opposition, he marries the girl his sister went to school with and “perfectly detests.” It was the recommendation of her daughter-in-law, given by the Marchioness of Hartleap, that when Miss Grantly entered the family, “the dear child saw nothing and heard nothing that she should not hear.” Perhaps this sentiment lies deep at the root of the popularity of deaf and short-sighted wives, to whom I have more than once seen poems addressed by adoring husbands.

Now this accumulative evidence puts the working

of providence in a humiliating light. I insist that Jane and I could have managed better. People are too much interested to choose their own husbands and wives. It is like a sick man prescribing for his own case, a lawyer being his own advocate. If I were a marriage broker, I should match dispositions and tastes, and so secure happiness in companionship. Of course one could find out a good deal about one's prospective bride or groom by talking to the little brother, the maid or valet, the dress-maker, the old schoolmates. But there is a prejudice against spying, which we suffer from; so I should put in every lover's hand a catechism in which are printed questions about tastes and ideals.

For instance: since where one is to live is an infinite source of matrimonial discussion, let query No. 1 be, Which do you prefer, town or country? A person in love will, of course, try to discover the preferences of the beloved, and will be ready to cry for the green fields and solitude or the city's busy mart, as the loved one indicates. But even a lover hesitates to set himself down in black and white, knowing that in after years he will be confronted with this declaration, while a lady's written opinion upon this important subject would enable a somewhat cautious suitor to cry off before it is too late.

Another of the chief causes of matrimonial discontent is a difference of opinion about society. A man who has not passed an evening at home since

he left college will marry for the sole purpose of standing in front of the fire from eight to eleven and haranguing his women kind. The prospect of dining in another man's house reduces him to the deepest gloom, or incites him to rebellion. If his wife is a social creature, she gives lunches to women, and frequents afternoon teas; but she seldom ventures to quicken his thirst for solitude by asking people when he is expected to be at home. If then the swain objects to what he would call a butterfly or a gad-about, let him mark this question in the catechism with red ink. The woman eating her heart out for a little commingling with her kind, the man strutting up and down the hearth-rug talking about the tariff, is so useful an element of the literature of fiction that one hates to deprive the novelist of his thunder by alluding here to the situation. But it is gratifying to know that not all women need succumb. Jane and I know a young lady of decision of character, who married a man whose life had been lived, and whose orange had been squeezed. She stayed at home with him, immuring her youth and beauty with his age, for three years; and then she put him in the third story, locked the door and placed the key in her pocket. Now and then a passer-by can hear him chirp like Tithonus, and with a fine irony she calls him her "cricket on the hearth."

Nor from a false feeling of delicacy should certain peculiarities fail to be investigated; for after

marriage all sorts of painful discoveries will be made. For instance, we had a friend who found out, on returning from her wedding tour, that her husband had forty pairs of trousers, and demanded house room for them all. And if this tale is not sufficiently pregnant with warning, I will relate another of an acquaintance whose husband never allowed her to sell or exchange his old shoes or his overcoats for china vases or the seductive contraband linen which Italians bring round to people's back doors, giving even untravelled persons an opportunity to cheat the government. And it is well here to press the question: Are you a devotee to sport? While no amateur sportsman ever added a minnow or a reedbird to the family breakfast-table, crafty men have been known to declare themselves such, that they might keep all their old hats, old shoes, old cravats, against the time they are "going fishing or hunting." And I should look sharply at the man who is used to lots of room. Jane knows a harmless-appearing North Carolinian whose bride found her best hat on the floor, where he had cast it in a rage because she had put it on his top shelf. These ruses to keep their things, though threadbare, are singularly effective with loving wives. Candidates for matrimony should investigate before they are weakened by marital affection.

What books one likes, is a pretty sure indication

of character. We had a friend very much in love with a young man who seemed unobjectionable, but who had a passion for reading lives of Jeremy Bentham and his economic successors. We said, "He will be methodical, strict, and make you go to church Sunday mornings." Neither Jane nor I are women to say, "I told you so," but it is not without gratification that we see her pass at eleven o'clock hot July mornings directing her steps to St. Barnabas, nor do actual tears flow when she tells us that "in our house breakfast is on the table at 8 A. M." . . . And if the plaintiff will condescend to take advice from the defendant, do not marry a woman who likes Dickens or Mark Twain. The taste betrays humour, and humour in woman is not a safe domestic quality. . . . And a girl, on her part, should not consider the suit of a man who owns to a love of fiction. Why a novel is considered unmanly reading, and why if his wife gets one for him, she should think it necessary to explain to the librarian that he only reads fiction as a sedative when he is kept awake by his profound thoughts, we will know when we know the lost art of colouring. Even Jane and I are apt to disclaim a love of light literature on the part of our men folks, and when John was absorbed in "Mamie's Lover," we screened him from the housemaid by making him read it within the leaves of "The Story of a Play," which Mr. Howells has bid us know is not romance, but truth.

It is admitted that when people once fall in love, the catechism is thrown away. A person in love will say anything. One of the favourite confidences of lovers is, "Do you think so?" with delighted surprise, "Why, I have thought so all my life, but I never dreamed that anyone else did." Or, "Are you fond of that poem? You are? Now that is the strangest experience. I have loved it since I could love anything." . . . Jane and I know a nice girl married to a captious little man of whom she unblushingly asserts: "William and I think exactly alike." If she had really thought William's thoughts she would have been to this day Miss Matilda Brown. And I know another girl who would run all over the tables and chairs and finally perch on the mantel-piece under, it is true, the severe provocation of a threatened visit from a mouse, who spent the night in a locked wardrobe under the craven fear that she heard someone in the back porch, whose wrists were too slender to hold a mallet, and who had sun-stroke if she went shopping in May,—I know such a girl, I repeat, who, under the impulse of sudden love, played golf in August, patted her lover's bloodhound, and expressed a desire to live in a place in the Rocky Mountains called Bloody Gulch. . . . I heard a man who could not tell "Dixie" from "Star-Spangled Banner" declare, under the inspiration of passion, that chamber music was his delight, and that he would prefer assisting at a

fugue of Bach to sitting in his club window Sunday morning and seeing all the other men go to church.

Sincerity in expressing community of taste is not to be looked for in people in love, and their sentiments are to be regarded as perjuries, which, as De Quincey says, excite a misplaced humour in Jove.

After matrimony one returns to one's original opinions, and then, too late, one regrets the catechism. Aware of this fact I advise each candidate for matrimony to send a heartbroken poem to the object of the passion with a postscript explaining that as, under the distressing circumstances, it is impossible to get at the truth of either party's real tastes or opinions, the writer has decided to say good-bye. And then, if I were he, I would exchange a neat little set of questions with some dispassionate person, recommended by her maid, her desk mate, her dressmaker,—all of whom have the amplest opportunity of knowing her,—and I should get her to reply to them with candour.

And one of these days when you both want to go to Europe, both like oatmeal, both prefer mahogany to oak, and both sincerely and without reserve dislike the people next door, you will thank Jane and me for this advice.

XII

Should Women Propose

MY Janet asks it, looking straight into my eyes with her unblinking, unshrinking blue ones.

To tell the truth, when I look at the child—strong, wholesome, candid, a creature without a devious way, all open rolling ground, like a stretch of Kansas prairie, yielding interminable stretches of Indian corn, tall, vigorous, whispering utility in every wave of its graceful stalks—when I look at the child, as I say, I demand of heaven why it gave me a daughter like this, who is much too good for me, instead of the little girl next door, who is not good enough, but the kind I'm used to.

Janet belongs to a large class of women who honestly prefer the single life, if only with the single life they could have the honours universally accorded to the married. To be sure our girl misses exclusive affection less than would Jane perhaps, because she has contracted a devoted friendship with an unpleasant-looking person named Martha, whom she met in college, and has forced upon her family under the threat that if she is not "lovingly welcomed,"

our only daughter will hire a bachelor apartment, and give lessons on "digestible foods" to her young gentlemen- and lady-acquaintances. Martha, she tells us, has a "beautiful soul," and as I, too, have found the phrase useful—in describing John—I really have no consistent objection to make to it.

Still, she misses things. She would like to go where she pleases without an elderly, panting female in her wake, or a younger, prettier one, on whom the title chaperon sits lightly. She would like to wear the ancestral pearls on her round white throat, she would look well in sables, and certainly she would adorn black velvet.

But these to her are minor matters. What she wants is not the sofa—place of honour in the continental drawing-room, not the seat on the host's right hand, not even does she yearn to "clear the drawing-room," but she wants the deference and respect accorded the married woman.

And it is provoking that no matter how sensible the unwedded Kate may be, and how silly Mamie, the fact of "Mrs." before Mamie's name confers upon her at least the credit of understanding. Whom did the Archdeacon consult on the momentous question of whether or not Henry Grantly was to have his allowance stopped, but "that dear girl who has married so brilliantly, and been such a delight and comfort to her family." And yet when Griselda was a maid, she was esteemed dull; and

the Archdeacon had looked at her and sighed, and wondered how so intelligent a parent had produced so stupid a child. She to whom nobody listened before this prefix was hers by right, is granted respectful attention, while Kate, to whom many have piped, though she has not danced, is set down as unable to give an opinion.

More, to her who is free, her very freedom is the opportunity of the married. As she is supposed to be a stray creature with folded arms and empty heart, the real prisoner gives her all her chores to do, and fills up the blank hours with such diligence that the unmarried woman is apt to have to darn her own stockings after midnight Saturdays, and get to church panting like Orestes pursued by the furies.

But Jane tells me, and certainly she has had the most extensive opportunities to know, that these are after all material requirements; and she is perfectly willing to nurse the children through unpleasant infantile diseases, and stay with the darlings while their mamma goes to the theatre under the appeal: "Won't you, Jane? You know I never can do anything now; I am all tangled up."

The thing that stings is the provoking assumption of superiority of the wedded, which has goaded more than one woman with a distinct aversion to matrimony into entering it that she may add to her privileges and prerogatives. The phrases are fa-

miliar, "As a wife and mother I say what I do," "As a wife and mother I have feelings it is impossible for you to understand." Well, I don't suppose we can help it. To preen one's self upon these perfectly natural and not unusual distinctions between women and women is common to the sex. These expressions are in fact as old as the age of Pericles, and had been often used in the hearing of Sophocles in his own domestic circle. How else did he know enough to make Dejanira, in his tragedy of the "Maidens of Trachis," when the vestals come about her to console her, say, "You are but girls, and know not the heart of a wife and mother."

What, then, is the remedy? An intelligent person ought to get at a remedy for every ill. Now, reader, would you like me to say what sounds well, and what you want me to say, or would you like an honest opinion?

Well—since you force it from me—but stay, there are expedients. People, to add to their dignity, have adopted "Mrs." I think Pamela did, and all the heroines of Mrs. Sherwood's *Moral Tales*. As best my recollection serves me, "Mrs." Patty Peace was six years old. Then it was almost universally used by ladies who acknowledged to forty (I may remark in passing that the number of matrons was not perceptibly increased by this social regulation). Dr. Hale proposed that an independent girl buy a handsome, life-like dummy, and take him around

with her. He assures us that his silence and lack of responsiveness would not attract the slightest comment, or cause her embarrassment, as being in the least different from the average escort. . . . And Ouida tried to lift the burden of sex by proposing that girls marry very rich aged gentlemen, or very seriously wounded gentlemen with property. This idea at once became popular—as an idea, though dying persons of the male sex, possessing large estates, were not to be found on every doctor's list. Especially in Virginia, where the obloquy of being an old maid rested heavily, the suggestion was greeted with enthusiasm. I suppose there is no harm in telling it now, it is so long ago, and—well, I feel like telling it—a poor fellow died in C—— county, and five girls who had an unreasonable but deep-rooted aversion to matrimony, appeared at the funeral, dressed in widow's weeds. Not that they pretended to be married to him, but betrothed, since betrothal carries with it many of the honours, and much of the dignity, of marriage. . . . One of the supposititious widows was a relation of ours, and she told Jane that she never felt so mortified in her life as when first one, then another, till all five women trailed up the aisle, draped figures of grief, and sat in the front pew.

These most ingenious plans, you see, having fallen through, I do not believe there is anything to do about it, but accept the inevitable and marry. I think

I have proved to you, however feeble your reasoning power, that men do not care whom they marry; and they never marry the right person. I have told you how their choice is governed by opposition, propinquity, habit. A woman, on the contrary, always has a reason for taking this step. It may not be a high reason, it may be because he is rich and well placed, well born and executive, maybe because he loves her, or she loves him, but she has a reason. The stolid, stuffy girl will choose the stolid, stuffy man; and she whose soul is in velvet carpets and quartered oak, will find in them her spirit's home.

Like plays with like, and woman, with her lack of sentimentality, perceives it and acts upon it. No woman was ever heard of who married three brothers in succession and then a first cousin, because she had gotten used to dinner at five, and the way the back parlour looked. She is even able to resist the young man who comes with regularity to collect the gas bill, and I myself have seen a hospital nurse who did not marry the beardless interne with whom she dressed wounds.

In a word, a woman knows what she wants, and loves substantial qualities like character and brown stone fronts, intellect and rubber tires. Is it not, then, absurd—the custom that permits her to select every article in her home, from the doormat to the bric-a-brac, from garret to basement, and then for-

bids her to name the person she dutifully calls its "master"?

A man who cares nothing about a house, and very little who keeps it, may go out, and, by holding up his finger, get a bevy of beauties that would take the prize at any county fair. The woman, to whom husband and home are the whole world, must sit and wait, like the little Sister in Solomon's song, "for the day in which she shall be called for."

"But," says some relic of mediævalism, "she may pick and choose; under existing conditions, every girl chooses among her suitors." "Among her suitors," granted you, in the sense that she chooses when half a dozen chairs are brought to her, and she is told she may have one of the lot. Who cares, pray, for any chair, when she is restricted to those that are brought to her? That she may not go out and look for them creates in her the feeling that she has no mind for chairs, whereas, if she were allowed full liberty to choose where she wills, she would make a better bargain with half the money.

Now, last year all the clever, rich, Christian young men who got married were under age, and people talked dreadfully about improper influence. To be sure no one dared openly to say, "Belinda B—— asked Harry H—— to marry her," but they declared that Mrs. Billy Martin, Belinda's great friend, shut him up with her in a country house for three solid weeks, and he gave in. They said Bertha

N——'s mamma invited George B—— to Sunday night suppers, and told him to give his opinion frankly about the wine, and made him take old Mrs. Webster home, just as they do the poor thing who married the eldest girl. How much more noble, more honest had these young ladies come out in plain terms, told their love, mentioned what papa allowed them, and what grandpapa had done for Carry when she got married. Of course it would be a trifle embarrassing at first. All reforms bring with them a sense of strangeness. I should not myself, were I a girl and in love, enjoy a letter containing the information that, whereas he respected my character, he had not become attached to my individual self. And when it came to sending people on whom my somewhat errant fancy lighted, cigarettes, cigars, riding whips, and bric-a-brac, out of an income of six hundred dollars a year, I would admit that the new way has its shady places.

And one thing I should certainly make an arrangement about. Martha, who is a perfect protection against the other sex—Martha shall accompany Janet when she calls on young men to whom she is paying attention. They tell me that no well-bred young gentleman ever receives without his mother or some settled relative to give him countenance. But we live in rather a provincial town, where it has not gotten about that it is bad form to visit in the evening, and I don't want Janet to go courting

where there are dogs or men that look like robbers coming round dark corners.

But, after all, what a fuss women make about proposing. One would think it had never been done before. But it has been done. There was La Belle Maguelonne; what more delicate, more charming, more unmistakable than the way in which she made known her sentiments? And Arethusa, delightful heroine of Fletcher's most graceful drama :

“ 'Tis true, Philaster, but the words I have to say are
such

And so ill beseem the mouth of woman that I wish
them said,

And yet am loth to say them.

Turn, turn away thy face. Yet for my sake a little
bend thy looks.”

Philaster: “ I do.”

Arethusa: “ Then know I must have them and thee.”

Philaster: “ And me? ”

Arethusa: “ Thy love, without which, all the land,
Discovered yet will serve me to no use
But to be buried in.”

Neither Jane nor I pretend to understand the subtleties of Sudermann or even Maeterlinck, but when a lady makes use of words like these, we cannot accuse ourselves of intellectual far-sightedness when we interpret them.

And that other occasion, the matter of the "Duchess of Malfi," poor lady! To be sure she "suffered the misery of us who are born great. We are forced to woo," but with what straightforwardness did she do it!

"Awake, awake, man!

I do here put off all vain ceremony,
And only do appear to you a young widow,
That claims you for her husband, and like a widow,
I use but half a blush in it."

And can you, let there be no reserves between us, arrogate to yourself a more womanly, if determined, manner than that with which Victoria approached Prince Albert, or Wilhelmina the trifling Consort? Now for personal testimony. It happened but lately, and came within our ken.

The lady struck one at first sight as firm, self-possessed, kind, but business-like. The man positively exuded happiness, as the hills of the Psalmist dropped fatness. He was "so glad of it, proud of it," as Miss Muloch would say, that he talked of nothing but marriage, and almost proposed to every woman he met, in his eagerness to have the whole world share his joy. In appearance, he suggested the old-fashioned child who has just had a twiggling, having long been promised it, and now was rid of the threatened punishment. Gabriel Oaks,

in "Far from the Madding Crowd," did not utter the word "wife" the day of his wedding oftener or with more unction, and he could not thirst without saying, "Please give *us* some water." And yet, for some time before the marriage, that young man gave unmistakable evidence to the excellent woman who is now his wife, that his affections had wandered, and he believed that, if his wishes were consulted, he would rather not. There was another girl, a particularly pretty girl, and most sympathetic. His now happy bride heard him, asked her rival's name, remembered that she could neither keep a house nor an account, and possessed a complexion that would fade, and a temper that would grow tart. Having gone over these things in her mind, she issued the following decree to her fiancé: "William Henry Martin, on the 25th day of next September, you will marry *me*." Before her determination, her courage, his foolish fancy died like the flutter of the summer wind. They were married at the appointed time, and his subsequent life has been an epithalamion.

XIII

Do Men Propose

STILL Janet hesitates, and a rare but beautiful blush dyes the coolest cheek in all the ranks of maidenhood:

“Mamma, I am afraid I could not do it.”

Chut, child, do you think I would advise you to start a movement? I am simply putting away an obstacle, throwing down an idol. In your Aunt Jane’s and my belief, the result of patient investigation, were the whole truth known, we have not sufficient evidence to carry our case to court that men ever do propose, or if ever, so rarely that they are commemorated in novels, and quoted, as people quote George Eliot and Miss Austen, to prove that women have humour.

Now people get married, but what is said on the occasion that opens the way to marriage is retained with such difficulty in the minds of those interested, that it is neither reliable nor entertaining.

If, for instance, you asked your mamma, she would very properly say: “He threatened to kill himself,” and that her giving away was simply

yielding under the physical strain of his threatening and unnerving demands. Your papa, on the contrary, might, for purposes of self-glorification, describe the storming of the fortress, and his laying low regiments of valiant suitors; but it is more than likely that he will say that he alluded casually to his dislike to bachelor's quarters, and the first thing he knew he was in your grandpapa's study telling him falsehoods about his income. In general, he has the air of an entrapped rabbit, or Rosamond in Miss Edgeworth's tale, who, under the impression that it was coloured glass, spent her money on a jar filled with purple dye.

Now eyes and ears, as it is not necessary to tell an intelligent person, were made before books, and are more reliable sources of information; but in default of verbal testimony, I will quote the novelists to prove my point, and show that in the matter of proposing there is no innovation that may embarrass the most delicately minded female. To the question: Do men propose? I can reply: It has certainly been done.

"Since I saw you first, Beatrice," says Esmond, "after our separation—a child you were then—you have had my heart, such as it was, and such as you were: I have loved no other woman."

So far, so good, spoken like a man, or as we have been taught to believe like a man.

"Will you be mistress of Carvel Hall, Dorothy?"

Halloween is the day that I ask it." Excellent for Mr. Richard Carvel.

"I would like immensely to marry you, to make you my wife," says Mr. James' "American" to his countess."

"Evelyn," says Philip, in "That Fortune," "you must know that I love you."

Positively, I begin to back water; the accumulation of testimony against my theory, while gratifying to female vanity, is piling up on the other side.

But Daniel Deronda is at my elbow, and Grandcourt is the first in the long list who puts the question in what one might call a tentative way.

"Do you command me to go? Do you accept my homage?"

The responsibility is thrown upon Gwendolyn, and George Eliot recognises the calculating spirit, which entrenches itself against a refusal.

The risk, you see, is not taken by the suitor.

Sir Charles Grandison did his courting with the strictest regard for the proprieties.

Both the aunt and the grandmother of Miss Byron were present, and with commendable delicacy, these excellent women, scenting affairs of a private nature, moved to go. The pattern of decorum was however of another mind and bid them stay where they were.

"Neither of us would have you elsewhere," he said, and then from his decent lips issued this re-

markable sentence, whether uttered for purposes of self-protection or from extreme of refined feeling I am at a loss to determine: "Can you, Madam?" To which, Miss Byron, who, to be frank, was not coy, promptly and without circumlocution replied: "I can and I do." The language of lovers holds, it must be confessed, something of a mystery to the outsider, but to Miss Byron "Can you?" was as evident as the noonday sun.

The closest investigation does not reward the reader with any reason to think that the cautious Staniford, in "The Lady of the Aroostook," made any remark of a more hazardous nature to Miss Blood than the following: "Do you think I wouldn't? I'm longing for it." Upon which slender foundation (so it seems to Jane, who is a trifle haughty) Miss Blood announced her engagement.

When Lothair made up his mind that it was best for the interests of his country that he should marry, he took the Lady Corisande into the garden, the Duchess' own garden, and I suppose that the act carried with it a significance not evident to the democratic mind. There they looked at the roses, and had he selected one whose exquisite face lifted itself to his, and given it to her, I think an American girl might have drawn an inference. I do not know how it would have been with a Briton, who, we think, is not so bright. But from the text, somewhat overlaid with oriental imagery, I do not gather

that any such thing happened. But this I know: five minutes after this excursion, Lothair was leading the peeress in her own right into her mother's presence, and saying, "*See, Corisande has given me a rose.*" I am sure neither Jane nor I feel ourselves fit to criticise the aristocracy, but it does seem that if it is proper to communicate one's wishes by signs, Lothair ought to have done the rose-cutting.

When Miss Grantly went to the ball, and danced a time or two too often with Lord Lufton to please his somewhat lukewarm rival, the Marquis of Hartleap, you remember that nobleman had no idea of making more than his accustomed safe remarks about the heat of the room and his own state of boredom. Goaded on, however, by jealousy, he did at last allude to the lesser sprig of nobility as "that cad," which belittling expression he followed with "that puppy." Now neither of these remarks fails to convey the sense of the existence of passion, but I put it to you whether you yourself, wanting to be both dispassionate and fair, could honestly construe them to be words of love. And yet for the result they had on poor Hartleap's fortunes, they might have been: Marry me next week by private license.

"I think you had better take me to Mamma," whispered the in-possession-of-all-her-faculties Griselda; and what was spoken of in exclusive circles as an "alliance" followed.

Most of the readers of this book are too young to

remember the splendours of "Granville de Vigne" fiction, which Jane and I drank out of a quart cup, at a draught, in the middle of the last century. But in its lurid pages there is a scene, not to be dislodged even by such absorbing literature as "The Cardinal's Beretta." It is the night of the ball, in the sweet-scented conservatory, and the throbbing pulse of the band is keeping time with their heart-beats.

Over her yielding form bent the dark-eyed Sabretache, who broke the perfumed silence with one word. It was "Violet," nothing more. And yet that young woman, with the assurance of one who had received, signed, and witnessed a proposition of marriage, murmured, "I am thine," and sank—never mind. But speaking with calmness, should the careful mother of daughters commend it as a precedent to be literally followed?

A young man might, you know, utter the word "Emma" or even "Mary Jane," and that upon a summer evening, and have no intention of getting married. After all, there is something in a name, and a sweetness may exude from "Violet" which is not to be extracted from the mere mention of "Ann" or even "Matilda."

I said that a great deal of unnecessary fuss was being made over the sensible proposition that women propose. And later I let fall in confidence the remark that, were it permitted by the canons of society, after all no great change would be noticed.

So it is with the greatest satisfaction that I record the reply of Miss Edgeworth's Caroline, when Falconer, who took some time about it, proposed; and this matchless female responded in the following unique manner: "I am at present happily occupied in several ways, endeavouring to improve myself; and I should be sorry to have my mind turned from these pursuits." But to be frank, Caroline is an exception. Ostrander in Miss Phelps' "Story of Avis," encouraged by the experience of his predecessors, in the matter of protecting their own sensitive feelings, ventures to address the object of his regard as a spoiled child addresses its nurse: "Let me hear you say it," he thundered with solemn authority. "You dared not."

"I dared not?" replied Avis.

"Let me know why not."

"Because you did not ask me." A most excellent reason and so disarming that Miss Phelps permits her pride of sex to have a moment's sway, and under the force of it makes Ostrander stagger, pant, and finally fall down in excess of emotion, but spoils the moral by sending Avis on her knees beside him.

Nor is Emanuel Bayard more glib when his time comes, though he was in a physical condition wretched enough to gratify the pride of the most exacting female. "His face," says the author of "A Singular Life," "was ashen, and like stiffening clay he went white, as if he were smitten with death

rather than love." We gather that Helen had on her purple gown, while the yellow rose bloomed on her breast—a combination which had always proved too much for the sensibilities of Emanuel. And in the presence of a person in so convulsed a state, I suppose there was no harm in her saying what she did say. But if we are looking for facts, Emanuel did not speak, nor do I believe that before a jury that dear girl could have gotten damages; for it was from her virgin lips that the utterance fell, "I do understand, I do, I do. Would it be any easier if I told you I have loved you all the time?"

I am ashamed to be such a slave to superstition, and yet I can't help blushing when Jane, who is helping me collect these scientific data, gives me "Harry Richmond" open at "Otto, she cried, her face suffused with lovely blushes [thank Heaven for that], Otto, you love me!"

Do, then, men propose? When women cry, they do. "'Twas after a scene of ignoble quarrel on the part of Frank's wife and mother, that I found my mistress in tears, and I then besought her to confide herself to my care." This is Esmond's second wooing. . . . As for Elinor Dashwood, I cannot understand how that model of sense and conduct could have so behaved when Edward Ferris finally put her out of her misery by announcing that his brother, not he, had married Lucy. "Eleanor could sit no longer," says Miss Austen, "but almost ran out of

the room, and burst into tears of joy," which simple and natural expression of feeling had its effect upon the laggard Ferris, who, before the page is turned, really did frame the question, not, one may venture to surmise, with any definite or harassing fears of the result of his proposal. . . But they were not always tears of joy. As far as a disinterested non-participant can judge, the heavy dragoon, Captain Crawley, had no idea of changing his bachelor state when he happened upon Miss Sharp alone on an eventful morning, and in his graceful way rallied her upon the admiration of his papa, Sir Pitt. "But she flung back her head scornfully. She looked him full in the face. 'I can endure poverty, but not shame; neglect, not insult; and insult from you——' Her feelings gave way, she burst into tears. 'Hang it, Miss Sharp, Rebecca, by Jove, upon my soul, I wouldn't for a thousand pounds—— Stop, Rebecca!' The deed was done. . . On one occasion and only one, as far as my recollection serves me, we have been reproached with a "lack of woman's weeping, a dearth of woman's tears," and that at the battle of Bingen; but, as it occurred before the time of Miss Barton and her coadjutors, we were absent through no fault of our own, but because we had no business there, and I do not think we merit reproach, since we have done our best to make up for it by opening our flood gates at every opportunity. . . The fascinating Mariana, in "Phases of an Inferior Planet," not

only goaded Algarcife to a proposal by exciting his jealousy, she wept also. She received a letter from home, cutting off her remittances, and forthwith went to this somewhat gullible young gentleman with the announcement, backed by streaming eyes: "I won't go back, I'll marry Mr. Paul," whereupon Algarcife (he had "spoken slowly and with restraint at first,") fell into a pitiful snare, and said: "Mariana, you will not marry Mr. Paul, you will marry me." The truth laid bare by these researches seems to be that in all young and even middle-aged men there is a reluctance—that reluctance of which Matthew Arnold complains in the poet Gray—"to speak out," always excepting one class, of which I will discourse later. . . . "Sieur Grandissime, you godd dat grade rispeg fo' me and I godd dat grade rispeg fo' you, but"—she bit her lip—she could not go on. "Aurore," said her lover, bending over her and taking both her hands, "I do love you with all my soul." "Mais, fo' w'y you di'n wan' to sesso?" Ah, she touched the spot, Aurore. "Mais, fo' w'y they di'n wan' to sesso?" Is it that they fear a repellent "no"?

I cannot soothe womanly pride with this belief, for Jane with her own ears heard a man from Gloucester county declare that he would marry no lady who would say "yes" the first time.

But the exception to these persons, timorous, doubting, fastidious, are those who have known matrimony.

Widowers are a class in which I should say, speaking largely, there is no nonsense. "So, Eleanor," said the new dean in "Barchester Towers," "we are to be man and wife." A sensitive mind would infer little coquettishness on the part of Mrs. Bold, since her suitor was so sure of his ground, but that high-spirited lady doubtless knew what was best for her and her darling little Johnny. . . "I can't git along without you; the house all goes wrong; come back and be my wife; you'll have it your own way and I'll make a settlement." And it is recorded that upon this occasion the inimitable Becky shed tears whose bitterness cannot be doubted, but which were not the tears of disappointed love. . . "And he was deadly pale, poor Lovel, and much excited, but he went up to her and said: "Dear Miss Prior, dear Elizabeth, remain in this house with such a title as none can question—be the mistress of it—be my wife." . . When Mr. Haydon, in Miss Jewett's "A Second Spring," found that Marie Durant was going away, leaving him to salt his own fall pork, he made the following proposition: "I expect you know what I want to say, Miss Durant. I'll provide well for you and make a settlement. How do you feel about it? You feel it would be good judgment, don't you?" And Marie Durant felt it would be good judgment, and the pork was salted in approved fashion.

This is perhaps not the time to say it, but you

may notice that all these marriages, distinguished by the business-like clearness with which they were proposed, were suggested to the widower by his purely masculine trait of objecting to a change.

Man is a creature of habit, and though I have never with my own eyes, as I told you, seen him darning stockings, no more have I beheld him domiciled with a rattlesnake, but I am ready, as Mrs. Gamp asseverated with some warmth, to go to the stake a Martha for it, that, did this unpleasant reptile remain long enough in his house for him to get used to it, he would certainly remark, did it propose to leave: "Why go? I am sure we are very comfortable as we are."

XIV

Should Men Marry

BUT if you were a man?" said James, coming in at this particular moment. "'Let the young women marry,'" I replied, quoting Scripture. "But since you ask me, James, if I were you I wouldn't."

The popularity of marriage is decreasing every year, and the number of bachelors so far surpasses that of married men that to win one from the order is to achieve a triumph; and they have a supposititious value, like fish hooks in Labrador and moho feathers in the Sandwich Islands.

Were unmarried men plentiful as they were in our time, of course it would be different. Women were so rare in those prehistoric ages that all the world was like a Western mining town, and a lover who succeeded after long years of servitude in gaining his suit was distinguished among his fellows, and sent to Congress or adopted into a rich firm, being credited with boundless tact and acumen.

But since their mysterious disappearance, men have become disproportionately important. We

mammas are said to be censorious when we go up to the morning room, and drink tea, and the "hens are all on." But all censoriousness ceases when we begin to talk about the bachelors. "Not handsome, perhaps, but such a fine open countenance," or, lest mildness suggest faint praise, "Frightfully ugly and deadly fascinating." Even poverty, in these hard times, is not disgraceful in the right sex. "Was not Mr. Rockefeller poor?" asks the chastened parent of six dear girls, seeing sermons in stones and good in everything.

Jane and I know a bachelor who ogles, and being of an excitable nature, when moved to laughter (and he is easily amused) claps his wings on his sides and crows. But on his narrow breast he wears the badge "eccentric," and is treated with respect and a pretty air of deference, while pretty girls murmur in his ear: "I wish I wasn't commonplace!"

Of course what is said here is intended to go no further, but in my opinion James' platitudes are received with an enthusiasm to which they are not entitled, and he owes the respect with which they are greeted to his bachelor condition, not to their intrinsic merit. Now it seems to me if I were in Utopia I would stay there. If my words were the apples of gold in pictures of silver, alluded to in Solomon's Song, if my presence were languished for, and my tastes consulted, I should not, as did James the other night, show a dangerous symptom

by asking the price of coal, and whether one could have one's shirt fronts done decently at home. In fact, in James' place, for all the interest these questions had for me, they might have been answered in an extinct Semitic tongue. For if ever in a man's life a fictitious value is put upon him, it is when he is single and disengaged, but if he really desires to know his actual worth, he can satisfy his curiosity by noting the oblivion of his fellow creatures to his very existence, does he simply announce his betrothal. It is a matter to muse on, what becomes of all the charming young men who adorned society a few seasons ago.

They were clever, kind, "just religious enough to suit my Isabella," but utterly has the wave passed over them. "Where," demands M. Verlaine "are last year's snows?" What really has become of them, to quote the experienced Stevenson's cheerful response, is: "They have passed the altar, and entered the long run home, dusty and straight to the grave."

For myself I cannot picture a more sickening sense of change than that which must come to the bachelor of the present day when he wakes to the fact that, socially speaking, he has forfeited his right to live. Until his head was put into the noose, and "it is a noose, you know," says Mr. Brook in "Middlemarch," he was accepted on his bachelorhood and no questions asked. Nice girls were

willing to spend long afternoons entertaining him, and Jane and I knew a poor widow of aristocratic birth but decayed circumstances, by whose little parlour fire, at least ten impecunious men nightly sat between the hours of eight and eleven, not one of whom could have married her only daughter. This was a girl who slept afternoons in order to be fresh for persons who, in a remote and only partially civilised part of our country, are described by the obsolete term of "beaux." Jane proposed that our widow take up a little contribution among them once a week to keep up the fire, but this was frowned on as indelicate.

Stiff cuffs and a certain literalness, when possessed by young men, are set down to "strength" and "compelling power." That grim silence, that forbidding look of self-confidence you have probably resented in the youth, when you have seen him Sunday mornings walking home from church with a charming girl, while she pours out a flood of anecdote, wit, and appeal; none of these repellent characteristics seem to alienate her from him. "A man's a man," says the poet, "for a' that." But as the serpent bereft of his fangs, the lion of his teeth, so is the usual bachelor converted into a married man. It's a lesson that, the spectacle of the forlorn object sitting through a long dinner by a young woman who addresses herself to the man on her left, and who, when the Benedict would cut in, as was

his former playful habit, regards him with a distant glance, and then going on with: "You were saying, Mr. Brown——?" gives him an opportunity to know exactly how she does her back hair. A year ago, he had only to open his lips, and that small, fair head bent to him as the rose to the summer wind. Now, he must shout his best story to the deaf lady across the table or devote himself to eating. Married men are accused of an inordinate fondness for food, but I think they are driven to it by neglect and dulness.

And one has only to read current literature to find how unpopular married men really are. Almost all the ladies who ask our sympathy in the works of Julien Gordon and other portrayers of high life are married to brutes. Most of the amiable and cultivated heroines of Mrs. Wharton's teaching volumes have quitted the marital mansion because "life under the circumstances was impossible," the circumstances generally being well-meaning men with, however, little artistic sense. Even a writer like M. Paul Bourget, who to our mind, Jane's and mine, is not trammelled by commonplace conventionalities, even M. Bourget has no word of sympathy for him. The entrancing "Termonde," in "André Cornelis," had even committed a murder. Miss Broughton and Ouida alone are his apologists, as instanced in Granville de Vigne, you recollect, and Sabretache and the hero of "Not Wisely but too

well." Stay, I have forgotten Mr. Rochester, but, frankly, I do not think either this victim of passion or the man in Miss Broughton's romance are persons one would "simply love to live with."

And while I am about it, I may as well tell the truth. Married men have a good deal to put up with. You have your little peculiarities. Yes, ladies, you know you have. You dislike crowds, you can't stand, you have that "peculiar feeling at the back of your neck"; you must have "air"; a necessity I have mentioned before, but it can't be named with too much *empressement*. And then about your reasoning faculty. I suppose you have heard about Women's Congresses, which are reported exactly as if they were the doings of clever trained animals, and have found out that the branch devoted to the legal profession was the greatest joke of all, and that these ladies were graded as inferior exhibits at a county fair, and marked fourth class. The fact is, I would agree with the reporters, but for certain compelling *esprit de corps*, and say that in my opinion we do lack what psychologists call "the elaborative faculty"; and though a supernaturally bright woman, an old acquaintance, has begun to practise law in our town, retaining enough of her archaic traits to defame our characters, because we do not patronise her, Jane and I have our legal business conducted by old Mr. de Russy, who wears a thin black alpaca coat, and never opens his lips, but

whose influence over us is such that, when he shoves an unread document toward us, we sign.

But for this *esprit de corps* I mentioned, I would tell you of a lady who gave as a reason for not marrying a man to whom she had been engaged for a year, that she didn't like the way he built his back porch. It is not unusual with us to refuse to buy a bolt of cotton cloth from a merchant whose mouth suggests inward traits repellent to our natures; and I have heard a lady refuse to shake hands with one of her husband's best friends, because she "had a creepy feeling" when he was around. I know that persons who wish to flatter us ascribe these peculiarities to a faculty they call "feminine instinct" (a quality we share with lower forms of animals), but these evidences do militate against belief in our dispassionateness.

"My dear," said Mr. Locker-Thompson, the poet, to his wife: "My dear, don't you think you are sometimes of rather too rigid a disposition? You know at the railway stations you often point out to me, as predestined to all eternity to a shameful end, a man who has incurred your ill opinion by wearing trousers of a rather broad stripe, and has an unusually large cigar in his mouth."

And then a man has to accommodate himself to the sort of food his wife fancies to give him. Most

women have a mania, about once a week, for dismissing the servants and putting on "the blue cloth," and having what they call "high tea." This repast is of an uninviting nature, sandwiches, jellies, and what the cook in "A Londoner's Log Book" calls "cold swets"—soapy-looking mixtures sent by Satan to buffet us, and known as "whipped creams." She never used to give him that sort of bubbly stuff in the old days. Ah, so far, so long, long ago! when terrapin stew was none too good.

And another thing, but I suppose a generous nature would not mind. No matter how long he has stood first on one foot, then on the other, debating "Shall I, or shall I not?" One fine morning he will overhear his Mabel's mamma talking him over with a friend.

"I suppose you know we were a little disappointed. Mabel is a gifted girl, and we rather expected—— Well, he simply would not take 'No' for an answer, and behaved so about that dear boy Reggie Blake's attentions that he made us all quite nervous, and Mabel was really unstrung. However, he is a well-principled young man, and, I frequently remind myself, looks and talent are not everything."

Of course it depends a good deal upon what sort of compliments a person is accustomed to, and what are his ambitions, as to how he takes these enco-

miums; but this brick, to quote an authority, will enable one to judge pretty well of what the matrimonial mansion is built.

Do I, then, counsel bachelors to so remain? Of my own judgment, yes; with authority, no. But this nugget of wisdom I will drop: When a man marries, he may feel like the person who bought the Punch and Judy show; and then again, he mayn't.

XV

Liking vs. Love

WE scarcely realise till we have tried love, how excellent a thing liking is. We can love, and be disgusted with the object of our passion—angry, jealous.

In literature, especially French literature, it is the highest proof of devotion to suspend one's wife over the banister by her back hair in fits of uncontrollable feeling; but neither you nor I ever knew a gentleman to put his spouse in this undignified position, or even to stab her, for simple liking. We will go further, we will say we never knew him to turn her out of doors because he entertained an affectionate friendship for her.

These acts, O Love, are committed in thy name!

But even practical people place liking on a low scale, while they elevate passion. I once knew a woman, whose testimony, it is true, was somewhat invalidated by her weakness of mind in keeping a boarding house to support an idle husband, say with wifely pride: "John doesn't always like me, but I

know he loves me all the time." If John had "liked" her all the time, she would not have had to go to market before breakfast, and he, not she, would have sat up with the sick baby, and played backgammon every evening with the Second Story Front, to give him "that home feeling." For it is the people who love us, who impose upon us, who blow hot and blow cold, are suspicious and exacting. A real liking, on the other hand, expresses itself in consideration and respect.

And above all, we can love one who bores us. Have I not seen you yawn, Belinda, and think the evening long, unrestrained as is your passion for George? But I defy you to show me a person who inspires genuine liking and causes his or her friend mental fatigue. A certain congeniality of thought, or opinion, or taste, precludes ennui in the other's presence. But let us haste to the evidences of love.

Until she was the object of a "wild devotion, never to be recalled," such as Captain Cuttle professed to cherish for the one, who so blithe and gay as our own Maria? Wordsworth's "Dolphin on the summer sea," was as cumbrous as a crocodile compared to her. Now she spends her time in tears. These unmistakable evidences of emotion are the result of notes, so violent in temper, so furious in expression, that they scorch the postman's hand, and have wrung from the parlour maid, a thin-skinned creature, as I have reason to know, a suppressed scream,

produced by fire applied to delicate flesh, when she would take them to the presence of the beloved. And are they not indeed distilled vitriol, recrimination, accusations, threats?

Now, I should like to know, would any influence but devoted, reciprocal love call forth such denunciations? And on her side, what induces Maria, pretty, gentle, and refined, to treat Robert as she does—to look at him with provoking coldness, to decline his invitations, to ridicule his poor attempts at pleasing her? Save affection, what induces Robert to take offence if she treats him with familiarity, suspecting a dark and sisterly feeling to be at the bottom of her infrequent efforts to behave to him as she does to the rest of the world?

When a friend for whom Robert entertains even a chilly regard has a headache, he is sympathetic and considerate. But the whisper of an indisposition on poor Maria's part is as kerosene oil to a lightwood fire. "It is a ruse," he roars, "a wretched ruse to deceive me, to get rid of me, to see that fellow. I will go away, and I will never come back again." And Maria, proud and happy to have evoked such evidence of unbridled passion, and made the thing she loves wretched, Maria pursues her smiling way until, well, until he gets a square off. Then, shall I tell it? then she adopts the policy of Miss Isabella Thorpe in "Northanger Abbey," who, you recollect, "though amazing glad to get rid of them," had no

sooner been assured by Catherine that the two strangers in the Pump Room had gone, than she proposed to go to Edgar's Buildings to look at her new hat, though Catherine innocently suggested only, "If we go now, we may overtake them."

And this gentle and pleasing passion having been excited, Robert goes about, like Mr. Philip Firmin, whom he ignorantly imitates, for he has "got quite beyond Thackeray," "upsetting the trays and making himself arrogant and disagreeable, swaggering about drawing-rooms," where, until he becomes the victim of the softening influences of love, he behaved himself like a gentleman.

It is too long to quote here, but if you will get out your second volume of "Philip" you will have an entirely accurate picture of the caprices and the insufferable manners of a person in love.

Certainly I do not want to be sensational, but when I think of the things people do to those they love, I wonder that at the first symptom that one has excited affection, she does not fly from it as from a pestilence. It is rather commonplace to cite Othello, but there he is, and there is Mr. Rochester. The first demonstrated his overpowering attachment by smothering, the second by breaking the bones of the beloved. In fact I believe Mr. Rochester improved on the Moor, and demonstrated his passion for the "too wildly dear" Miss Eyre, by threatening, after he had broken her bones, to throw her spare form

and fascinating green eyes out of a third-story window. This act he did not actually perform, but Jane was credulous, and he kept her up to her work by reminding her of his intention. . . Manisty, in "Eleanor," showed his hand to that astute and suspicious lady by his insulting rudeness to her rival Lucy. I suppose nothing but love could have made a gentleman purposely uncivil to his guest, a young girl in a foreign land. But it was for him to invent a special form of showing passion, a satanish device all his own. He criticised her clothes. . . But perhaps the hero of "An Englishwoman's Love Letters" 's way was as "convincing," as we say. He told her to be gone, he sent back her moist and blotted wails unopened, and at last, when he was sent for to receive her dying blessing, he firmly, though politely, pleaded another engagement. This last episode, you recollect, dispelled all doubt, all fear. "Now," uttered the departing spirit, with its last, faint breath, "now I *know* he loves me." . . And one more example of a perfectly natural and familiar phase of the disease. It is the æsthetic Alfred in the Polish novel "Maria" we are all reading. When the heroine humbles herself before him to the very dust, he rejects her with the following remark: "It is love's way to be cold, to be repellent. There is no true passion unmixed with anger." What sort of anger? "*Blind* anger."

In presence of final proofs of love like these, I am

almost ashamed to mention a comparatively trivial incident, but, as Sainte-Beuve said to Arnold, when he could not understand Lamartine's being considered in France an important person, "He was important to me." So this anecdote. And yet one hesitates because it is personal—— Well then, I know a lady—at least, I am told by a Greek philosopher that it is my chief business to know her—who in her youth suffered on one occasion from a bruised hand. It hurt dreadfully, and was injured by a man who, when he did it, cried out in a loud voice: "If it is not to be mine, it shall be useless."

Now we all have our moments of self-abasement, when we doubt whether anybody really cares whether we are alive or dead, but a searching examination of the conduct of our friends toward us will soon decide that matter. Has one among them been exacting, suspicious, and a retailer of unpleasant truths? Then, oh, doubting soul! take heart. "I am your friend," said the Hen to the Ugly Duckling, "and therefore I tell you these disagreeable things."

Is one among thy male acquaintances, oh, shrinking maid! who has contemptuously refused to dance with thee at the cotillion, or referred to thee as a "good girl, but not his style"—decide at once whether thou art ready to exchange thine own luxurious surroundings in the paternal home for his bachelor den. He is on the eve of a proposal. For

so love reveals itself, in depreciatory speeches, in slights, in neglect.

And a word about this passion in its general aspects. It is of so dark and resentful a character, as we said, that whole households are plunged in gloom when one member of it is love's victim. How we berate the postman if he brings it not, the longed-for letter! How countless the trays that go upstairs because "Poor Helen can't face people, she is so unhappy!" How frequent and crucial the interviews after midnight with Harry, who threatens to quit the country on account of that wretched girl, or, as he puts it in poetic if not strictly original language, "give up the struggle!" I have given you incidents sufficient to show the effect of love between young ladies and young gentlemen; but how about its malign influence when shown to excess between ladies and ladies? Madam, with the super-sensitive epidermis, whom do you persecute? Whom do you quarrel with and then make up? With whom are you exacting and then to whom do you take the liberty of speaking your mind? . . . It was the week before New Year's, and Jane came to Janet's mamma. "I have decided," she said, "what I want you to give me for my New Year present. You are to treat me exactly as you treat Mrs. Jinks." "Mrs. Jinks," echoed the lady addressed, "Mrs. Jinks!" Why, I have never treated Mrs. Jinks any way. I have lived beside her for twenty

years, and few people occupy less space in my thoughts, and yet it is as I conduct myself to this lady that my sister and life-long intimate asks me to act toward her! Really, when I considered the modest demand of Jane, "Pity," as "Night Thoughts" has it, "swelled the tide of love." Never was request more modest, more humble. In the face of it, I could think of nothing more appropriate to say than "Why, Jane?"

"Yes, I mean what I say. Mrs. Jinks is a woman to whom you are indifferent, but whom you respect, though you do not feel at home with her. You do not pretend to be wrapped up in her society, nor do you flatter her, but you say nothing that is not polite and kind. There are times when I deplore your inability to leave me, especially when you say that it was my headache which kept you from the Board meeting, nor do I wish your flattery when you do not wish me to keep you waiting, and therefore say to me, 'Do hurry, Jane, you need not stop to prink, you look well in anything,' especially when 'anything' means my old brown serge. Nor am I jealous of those intellectual intimacies you hold with 'women who read and think.' I want you to be to me as you are to Mrs. Jinks; because, were you so, you would be so much more comfortable to live with. For instance, because, through no fault of my own, we are children of the same parents, you scold me when I mislay a parcel or express an

opinion to which you do not subscribe. If I repeat in your presence a story that you have heard, well, we will say, for we are not children, a hundred times, you are impelled by the tie of blood to scream out, 'Oh, Jane!' Now, Mrs. Jinks also repeats herself, but who gives her more respectful attention than you? Why, I have myself heard you say, 'How very, very curious,' and in the right place, too, when she told—very well, we won't revive it. And John has a story, too, and it is not new, as he is not new, but whenever opportunity offers, you trot it out. You tell me this is marital devotion, but sisterly affection does not keep you from wounding *my* vanity. You have absorbed enough of the new cult of exaggerated respect for your children to beg James' pardon if your attention happens to stray by the faintest shade from his photographic and minute account of his talk with his tailor; and I confess that to see you in this fashionable but unnatural attitude is worth while, as a proof of what the style can do. Still I should like to ask a question. Why have no clubs been established for the protection of brothers and sisters against each other, or old and family friends against each other? No homilies from Mr. Henderson entreating the near relation to make his first cousins happy, no lectures from Mrs. Stetson-Gilman bidding us pause when we are about to say, 'Don't tell it,' to an elderly sister, or urging us not to look with 'solemn, grieved

eyes, when an aunt of fifty mentions to a niece of forty that she 'doesn't wish to discuss it further'? Why, I repeat, has not this reform been pushed? In default of it," continued Jane, "give me my New Year's present. Be as polite to me as you are to the accidental person next door, before whom you restrain yourself from expression of uncomplimentary opinion, and to whom you are civil and fair."

Jane is a person of little education, but excellent natural parts. It seems to me that her suggestions have a value in every household. And more, if, as Mr. Bernard Shaw astutely observes, we only treated our friends and relations as we treat our enemies, what a comfortable world this would be. If we are married, our opportunities being greater to display the agreeable results of unalterable affection, we use our little inquisitorial instruments with unbridled license. In proportion as we love, we tax each other, worry each other, are jealous of each other. We can't live a minute apart, and yet do not exchange a polite sentiment, and are to each other slave and master or mistress, as the case may be.

And how do we show our love for our children? I know an attached parent who let all her other children get married, but broke off the engagement of her special pet, because the special pet was too dear to part with.

And (I really feel that I must apologise for the

number of my acquaintances, for I would really love to be thought "eclectic") I know another lady, this time a young mother, who does not hesitate to wake her little boy when she comes in from a ball, to kiss him good-night.

"Johnny, you love me best in the world, don't you? Quite the very best?" And when poor drowsy Johnny nods, "Quite the best," how charming to hear her ejaculate, "There is nothing in the world as unselfish as a mother's love. I had to come all the way up here to see him." But I put it to you in all frankness—did ever man or woman wake a sleeping enemy to bid him good-night? No, these same people, mothers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, conduct themselves toward those whom they dislike with a self-respectful, even lofty demeanour. They are scrupulous not to speak ill of them, are almost deferential, are they thrown together.

The consciousness that one has done us an injury puts a seal on lips that, under other circumstances, are far from disciplined. We are even capable of doing our enemy a kindness. We seldom lack dignity in his presence. The truth is, we treat those we hate so much better than we treat those we love that, but for the name of it, it were better to be hated than loved.

"The child has not been a belle," remarks Jane, using the word for whose meaning you must look in

Doctor Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, "but for my part, I am glad, except in the heart of the exigent Martha, she has excited no overpowering affection. Better no flowers, no notes, no stolen interviews, than tears and breakfasts in bed."

XVI

Love and Forty

THE period when age is a reproach shifts with our advancement. Bulwer made his heroes his own age until he reached sixty. Then the timely critic warned him that he had come to the hour when the fires of passion run low, and that he must observe it.

But Bulwer was the exception. All the feats of courage, of understanding, or discretion even, were performed by persons, if we are to trust the novels, who, had one shaken them hard, would have shed their milk teeth. The silly young ladies in "Guy Mannering" were fifteen or sixteen, Rowena was eighteen, Beatrice Esmond not quite so old, Meh Lady was not, I think, turned twenty, Di Vernon had not come of age, nor Rosalind, and Juliet had not reached her sixteenth year, when the crises came.

As to candidates to matrimony, twenty-five years was the limit. From twenty to that decisive date was our harvest. If the eleventh hour struck and no man had called us, we retired into the ranks of

spinsterhood, or, if we waited, we waited for the second crop.

With scientific methods for prolonging life, we have now extended the period of legitimate enjoyment, with the result that all women have a right to exist with a full appetite for the pleasure of living till forty.

But forty is the six-railed fence where we pause, shrinking from the leap. There are pleasures appropriate to fifty and sixty. "Live and let live" is our motto. Decolleté gowns, butterfly bonnets, marriage, literary societies, all come under the head of blessings of middle age. The woman who has the courage to announce "I am fifty, and I like a sentimental novel and a Louise hat" has earned the fulfilment of her wishes. It would be like denying the condemned murderer broiled chicken the night before his execution, to deny her these or any of the above-named diversions. But there is something in the sound of forty, something in the position between youth and age, which is so humiliating, so irritating to her who has reached it, to her who is yet in sight of it, that Jane and I have never heard a truthful word about it from one who had a personal interest in it; while the only woman who will acknowledge it is she who has long passed it, and, if she speaks at all, must own to something worse.

Nor can we account for this prejudice any more than we can account for the inherent dislike to

snakes. We only know that when one woman wishes to send an arrow through the reputation of another woman, there is no better, surer way than "She is forty if she is a day"; and if one more kindly, but yet a woman, would lay a wreath upon the memory of the absent, she remarks of the friend who is still young, "How old? Oh, thirty-five or forty," though she knows it is but thirty-six.

Nor is it easy to be honest with one's self upon this subject. At thirty-nine the clock ceases to go. I knew an ungenerous husband to promise his wife a pearl necklace the day she was forty, nor need I add it was not until her great-grandchild stared her in the face that she permitted herself to demand the withheld treasure. Unlike the man who, when his doubting friends counted up the time he had professed to spend in the different capitals of Europe, found, by his own reckoning, that he must be ninety-nine years old, our reckoning is a gradual diminishing, and I am acquainted with a respectable lady who so long stood upon thirty-nine that a fair computation makes her a bride at three, a mother at four, and a grandmother at sixteen. To be sure, we are not unwarned. An observant person has it forced upon her by seeing that the majority of people she meets on the street are younger than she, and when she tries on a bonnet she has the experience of hearing the milliner tell her attendant to "bring something soft, with tulle strings, perhaps." Girls

give her "Mamma's love," and do not wait for her to call. And—it is a convenience, but it has its sting—she can go where she wills, alone and untouched by the breath of slander.

Her tastes, too, take on a positive quality; she begins to have a contempt for people who do not care what they eat, and supper has its place in the attractions of an entertainment.

Now, for my own part, I have always considered one of the most dangerous and revealing signs of the arrival of forty a sudden desire to cultivate the mind, a passion for clubs and literary societies, and a desire to be thought "cultured." I have a friend who mocked at this mellow mental state all her young and radiant life, and who used to say: "There's lots of time when one can do nothing else. I shall not waste good daylight with a stupid book." These audacious but sincere utterances were entitled to a certain respect, because she was a clever creature, and really knew by observation most of the things other people have written about. But the other day she came to us and demanded admission to the Dante Club, and though she wore a red golf-jacket and a short grey skirt and a grey Alpine hat with a feather in it whose dangerous propensity for putting out people's eyes guaranteed her the sidewalk, Jane and I looked at each other with a comprehending glance. And when another took up music, and began to discourse about her great talent

in that direction, and how she had been wasteful of it, but now that she had more leisure to resume her accomplishment she thought she would have an hour or two a week for Grunwall; though she did not know it, she had said as plain as words could say: "I've crossed the Alpheus, the sacred river that runs 'through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea.' "

Now if there were the least use in the world in denying it, if there were any possible way of warding it off, I for one would never acknowledge to forty. A feeling that is universal must be respected, and the repugnance to this particular birthday would probably be found in the mind of the Zuñi lady, as in that of the flower of American aristocracy. But no matter how one has preserved the outward insignia of youth and inward testimony that it still lingers, no matter how she may enjoy the society of vealy youths and lurid literature, even though she may give up her Shakespeare class because it conflicts with the manicure (which was the case with our cousin Camilla), there are always people around who have attended her christening, or helped her cut her first tooth, to bear witness of her approach to the fatal hour.

I suppose there are blacker deeds, but it seems to me that there is none quite so indicative of a selfish disregard of the feelings of others as that blatant way some women have of telling their ages. To my

mind it is a disease like that which makes morbid, half-insane persons for the hope of notoriety ascribe to themselves crimes they have never committed. Or it is a Samson-like act of vengeance. She pulls down the pillars and destroys herself; but behold the wreck of homes and lives she brings with her!

I myself know a woman, ambitious, but socially ineffectual, whose successful rival is her younger-looking, handsome, popular sister, than whom she is fourteen months older. Last winter, at a brilliant function where a charmed group, like clustering bees, was hanging about her delightful relation, I heard a distinct utterance which stilled that relation's girlish glee: "Yes, I was forty-two last March. Of course Agnes is younger, a little over a year."

Now you can think what you like, but, for my part, I believe that a woman who will criminate others by telling her own age, is incited to do so by motives of envy or revenge. We are as old as we look,—no, a good deal younger,—and it is useless to tell me that one who is bold about this intimate and personal matter is "to be admired for her candour,"—a quality women, chary of praise of their sex, do not withhold from her, nor need you assure me, as all men do, that she has that engaging quality they call "horse sense." All the women I know who have "horse sense" are matrons of public asylums or principals of public schools.

And while neither Jane nor I would wish to lower your ideal of human nature, I might as well, while I am about it, mention an instance of youthful depravity which will upset all those complimentary theories entertained by Mr. Henderson and Mrs. Stetson-Gilman concerning the repellent doctrine of original sin. For my part I was thankful enough, after I heard it, to jump into it and cover up my head and try to hide.

With a prescience beyond his years, and a cruelty not to be looked for in the heart of childhood, a boy of my acquaintance, now a grown man, used to attend the birthday parties of all his little friends; and on each such happy occasion, as they in their ignorance then regarded it, he took out a little book, in which he induced all present to write their names and ages.

You may perhaps recollect, in the "Rollo" books, a hateful boy named Jonas, who always had his pocket full of string, which saved the lives of Rollo and his sister when they were about to meet deserved deaths, which would have greatly added to the interest of these "I told you so" tales. Now a child, even a girl child, simple thing, is proud of its tiny weight of years, and not perceiving that this book was, in a way of speaking, "a pocket full of string," fell into the trap with cheerful alacrity. One poor creature, thinking that ten years looked well in writing, set herself down as eleven, as one

better, and also because she was emulous of appearing a trifle superior to her friend.

What, then, was the confusion of a company of his acquaintances when, recently, after long years, at a general festivity, where all were gathered, he presented his record, signed and sealed by the persons who were supposed to know best how old they were. Since this incident I have been expecting the tale-bearer to disappear over the falls of Niagara, like the man who told the Masons' secret; but, as yet, only the women who were betrayed have disappeared.

And yet there is such a thing as Love and Forty, at which not the most carping of a cynical audience—such as I fear I address—would smile. Once I would have seen it myself with just such unbelieving eyes. She was a tall, somewhat stately lady, a little inclined to what one might describe as austerity of line. There was the richness of maturity in her dress, but a sober richness, and her hair was a snow-white, folded like a gull's wing above a perfect brow. But for the rich, soft bloom, I would have called a certain number under my breath. But that and a sense of great strength and endurance made me hesitate. Where had I seen her? Ah, I had it! That manner of distant though perfect courtesy, the habitual melancholy of those dark eyes, except when they met the trustful glance of childhood, that certain gracious

sadness, as though in the affairs of the world she had only a dignified acquiescence—all this was told when I murmured the name of her who was honoured by the love of Thomas Newcome. But it is not necessary for a woman to have suffered great sorrow like Madame de Florac to evoke at forty love and admiration from the opposite sex. In the presence of the disciplined temper, the power to discriminate between sin and folly, a certain moderation in view (that lesson that Saint Teresa taught—not to make a matter of little things), all these possessions which ought to belong to every woman, simply from having lived in the world so long, the attractions of the most engaging of young girls pale. Nobody denies to youth its own illusive charm. But put the young girl on paper and she is crude or she is shadowy. “She is very beautiful,” I heard an artist say, “for so young a woman.” He had been sitting down with his pigments before him, but he was a character painter, not one of the modern French school, and he revealed the soul beneath, as did the master who painted Henry James’ “The Liar.” And there was no character to paint in this good, affectionate, pretty child.

You have seen Mr. Howells try it, and you have become acquainted with a number of very ill-bred young women, notably the insufferable younger Miss Kenton and the “impossible” Christine Dryfoos. (I believe it is proper here to use “impossible,” which

writers of the day treat like a lap dog and keep about their persons as a cherished pet.) But if they had not been vulgar, they had not been at all. Compare them with the keen, half-hard, half-kindly Isabel March,—with her conscience to torment herself, and her eyeglass to torment poor March, and yet poetical, understanding, vivid, wholly feminine, even now and then womanly,—and set her in the company of those hysterical young persons in “A Woman’s Reason,” or even the indefinitely repellent “Lady of the Aroostook.” Compare that most unpleasant woman of forty in “Indian Summer,” Mrs. Bowen, with the young girl Imogene, and though one pities poor Colville with all one’s heart, as one pities all Mr. Howells’ men, we can see how poor Imogene’s crudenesses, her aspirations, her demand for a sacrifice at the altar, even to providing the lamb in her own person, must have wearied the poor soul and stretched his neck and distorted his back, while, on the other hand, the woman of maturity understood him perfectly, made allowances for his masculine helplessness and incapacity, and, though she, too, must torment somebody with her conscience, made herself appear to him essential.

He has not told me so, but in my own opinion Tolstoi’s Anna Karenina was forty. “She had been,” says Mr. Howells, with the chivalrous and tender lenity to women which is his own most lovely characteristic, and which he ascribes to Tolstoi,

“ a loving mother, a true friend, an obedient wife,” till gradually she lost her way, and blindly, gropingly, took the step that submerged her. She must have been forty when she paid that stolen visit to her little boy, matchlessly described, forty when she had gained all that she had passionately desired, and, finding its burden intolerable, cast herself under the railroad train. Not forty in years, it may be, but of that maturity of soul, with that unerring sense of values that is forty’s reward or punishment.

Of French authors it is not necessary to speak. Except in modern stories played in Alsace about the Lutheran pastor’s family life, which Madame Bentson has made a sort of vogue, and which are more moral than entertaining, the French do not recognise the *jeune fille*; and in the novel of international life, except “ Daisy Miller,” and its imitators, she is almost grotesquely futile. But in the Princess Saracinesca, all that is pure, noble, dignified, is embodied. She was not a young girl when Sant Ilario won her from her many suitors, but a woman of the age I am holding up for your admiration, when she was worshipped with passionate devotion by her husband and her sons.

Of course I cannot tell how it is with one of another sex who has had several wives, and would finally renew his youth with a draught of a pure mountain stream, or, to throw aside the flowers of

metaphor, has an ambition to exchange his dressing gown and slippers for the unfriendly lobbies of ballrooms, waiting for a giddy young girl to get her fill of dancing. I am no Louis XII. married to Mary Tudor, who changed his dinner hour from ten A. M. to something like twelve or one, and perished a victim to a senile fancy six weeks after he had obtained this prize. I therefore do not speak from experience, but I know through literature that I would prefer to live, even were she forty, with Corona, than with Mr. Crawford's Cecelia, who, to be frank, makes me yawn.

But Mr. Henry James is my Lady's most eloquent advocate. Not that he, too, has been without his desire to draw the difficult young girl. He tried hard to make Nanda, in "The Awkward Age," interesting, and he has drawn a gentle and beautiful soul, besides conveying,—no, I am afraid to call it information,—we will say: the fact that these attributes can be possessed by the new-fashioned girl. But I myself care nothing for Nanda, and I only care for Aggie—that is—care to read about her—because she is a little cat. And Milly!—the Dove is mild, allusive. I saw a person the other day who professed—if I would listen to her—to be able to make me "realise," as they say, Milly. But this promise compelled my listening, which I have told you is a trial, and somehow did not carry with it weight. I think the woman was, in a way, sin-

cere, but that she wanted to impress me. Milly is a perfume, a gentle breath of expiring air. She never was alive.

But when Mr. James sets out to paint the woman of forty, all that impalpability vanishes. He settles himself down to his work. I believe if he let himself tell his story, as Mr. Howells tells his,—with that marvellous clearness of diction that sacrifices no effect to lucidity,—if he did not try to enrage his public with “irrelevant radiances,” and “labyrinthine parentheses,” his portraits would knock us down with their likeness. There is Isabel, in “Portrait of a Lady,” there is Christina Light, after she was the Princess Casamassima, there is Alice Dunbar, who had lived long enough to set love at the highest round and, to please him she loved, sacrificed herself to the convenience of another woman. There is the heroine of “Broken Wings,” in “The Better Sort.” The master does not heal the baffled worker’s wounded spirit with recognition or success. He recompenses her for all she had endured by “a wonderful hue of gladness in her lost battle, and of freshness in her lost youth.” Had she been the great person, the sought, the winner, poor Straith could not have brought to her his life of failure. But she was not. Her wings, too, had been broken and all that was left to either was courage. “‘But we have that, at least,’” she declared, “‘haven’t we?’”

Standing there at her little high-perched window, which overhung grey housetops, they let the consideration of this pass between them in a deep look, as well as in a hush of which the intensity had something commensurate. 'If we are beaten,' she then continued, 'let us then be beaten together.' She let herself go, he held her long and close for the compact."

And May Bartram was not young even when poor Marcher gave her his burden to bear in "The Beast in the Jungle." It was at the last, when she had the most to give him, that her wasted face delicately shone, and the secret—that she had loved him so much and he had never seen it—"glittered almost as with the white lustre of silver in her expression." May Bartram was the picture at forty of a serene, exquisite, but impenetrable sphinx. She kept the Beast in the Jungle at bay. Beside her the poor creature who leaned on her was a pitiful, contemptible thing, and yet, when she looked at him with her eyes, "still as beautiful as they had been in youth, only beautiful with a strange, cold light," the coldness melted, and she gave him the soft smile a mother bends on her child.

Of course one forms one's own opinions, but even the exquisite ideality of the young women of Tourgueneff fail to convince me that for the deeper intimacies of life, the woman of forty does not surpass in charm youth at its moment of dewy freshness.

My experience with the objectionable young man who kept the birthday book, and a cloud of witnesses besides, including that of a *débutante*,—who declared that she knew how old all the girls at her dancing-class were, because, at a certain date, all appeared and there was not a front tooth at the party,—make it seem a pity to waste a good fib on one's age. Morality permits us few enough of these useful aids to the maintenance of peace and comfort, and if I were permitted to offer advice, I would say: Store up yours for absolute necessity, as the early settlers kept their cartridges till they were sure of their Indian.

Not that it is insisted that we placard our backs with the fatal number. There should be distinctions between us and convicts in a State prison, but I am convinced that a sly way of circumventing our most intimate enemies is to follow Miverton's advice in "Kenelm Chillingly," and "make the wig early." The contrast between white hair and young face will at once excite interest. "Was it in a single night?" "Was it through shock or burglars?" "Was he drowned at sea?" Or that other dreadful thing they sometimes do—"Did he marry the daughter of his master who took him into the business?"

And after a while we will get so wrought up because the hair and face do not match that we will decide that she "has no age at all," as the maltster in "Far from the Madding Crowd" complained, whose

sons, with filial pride, counted both his winters and his summers, made him a hundred and seventeen years old, and were properly discredited by the social club. And so, if we begin to put in the grey at twenty-five, when we have arrived indeed at forty and own to it, the truth will be taken as was the confession of the good spies who came from Athens to Sparta, but, because they acknowledged it, failed to obtain the slightest credence.

XVII

One's Own

AT the symposium the other night, which we accidentally held at our house, we began to talk of the general attitude of people toward their own—meaning material things. F——, who is a student, and rather a serious-minded young man, said that they were impedimenta, and the more you had in the way of pictures, bric-a-brac, or furniture, the less you had of liberty. And then he made this blood-curdling statement: “For my part, I wish I could build a fire in the street, and with my own hands throw into it, piece by piece, all my mother’s furniture. First should go, and I would stand by and watch it burn, the old mahogany sideboard. When I was young, I was never allowed to open it, whatever my craving for bread and butter, lest I smear the brass scutcheons with my not immaculate hands. Then all the drawing-room things should go because, for years, we have had to come back to town in October, to see that the moths were not in the sofas and chairs, and to superintend the laying-down of the rugs. Then I should burn the house

itself, because, it having cost a great deal of money, my mother thinks it her duty to live in it instead of going to Europe, unincumbered, for an indefinite time. I do not," he went on, as if making a generous concession, "object to a comfortable bank account; for it lifts one from the vulgar necessity of making money; but things we own are weights to drag us down to earth. They are hostages which we pledge our lives to redeem. I heard a lady, who loved nature, say that she must leave the White Mountains last summer when the autumnal colours were just beginning to turn the forests into fairy land, because, did she not go home, the coachman would not exercise the horses, and they would get fat and lazy. 'Madam,' I said to her, 'are you going to let yourself be driven out of paradise by two dumb brutes of which, at any moment, you may rid yourself by the simplest commercial transaction?' To me, to own a thing means that I am under an obligation to it, and I regard anyone so encumbered as I do one who possesses a valuable dog; for one must either do its will or be its guardian angel. I think that I should prefer to be the guardian angel of a dog rather than of a bit of old Sèvres or a Daghestan rug, because there is excitement in the dog, and dulness in the rug. The dog may get the rabies, and both it and its owner may come to know the scientific methods employed at the Pasteur Institute; but no such unusual experience can be hoped for—

even by a sanguine owner of a porcelain cup or a prayer carpet. If you would be free—and the religious understand this, and only own the clothes on their backs and not them after they go to the laundry—possess your garments, your watch, and your cuff buttons—nothing more in the way of personal effects.”

While these remarks were being made, Janet's mamma was in a state of bewilderment that gradually approached that of frozen apathy, while Jane, poor wretch (I have been reading Pepys), wore a sickly smile, under the impression that the youth's remarks were a well-meant and entirely successful attempt to make our flesh creep. Then, we threw aside confessions of a personal nature, and talked about the way people in general regard their own, with the result that we added to our sum of human knowledge.

All agreed that we put an ideal value upon our own. Sometimes it is a depreciated value, a lower estimate than the market price, oftener an increased and supposititious one that exists in our own imaginations. In the first instance, when a thing comes into our possession, it is no longer precious. Rosamond's blue jar was only a blue jar while it stood in the chemist's window; once home, it was a stupid white one. For there are people who, from the very fact that a thing is theirs, underrate it. The garment to which they extended eager hands is no

sooner in their grasp than, like the old lady in Miss French's story, they long to get home to give it private burial in the back yard. All their things travel the upward way, from drawing-room to garret, disgust culminating in the shed under the roof. I have a friend who wisely buys nothing, sure that her husband's sister, a capricious, unsatisfied soul, will furnish her house for her at greatly reduced rates, with purchases which, once hers, this accommodating law relation finds odious in her sight.

But, between friends, though I feel it my duty to censure this vice in public, I do not think that it carries with it social unpopularity. The task of soothing a fellow creature is not without its pleasing features, and few there are who do not experience a sweetness in reconciling a frantic purchaser to an impossible lamp shade or a pictorial Smyrna rug. The opportunity to patronise, and gradually uplift another human being is one from which pure pleasure can be extracted. I have heard a person in whose taste I would not myself place implicit confidence, say, "Oh, how I long to get my hands on her," and this, not for a purpose that would "outrage decorum," as Lamb would say, but for a certain fondness, produced by the sight of another woman not looking her best. I believe I have said it before, but it may as well be impressed upon you that, do you want to excite the affections of your lady friends, you must buy the unbecoming bonnet, or the unsightly vase.

Your worst enemy will be placated, is she present, when you are lamenting your rashness, and will really get to like you, while she is reconciling you to your misfortune.

Now for the other illusion—that of people who regard their own with a smug complacency, simply because it is theirs—it is enough to make a bystander, like Mrs. Jarley in the fulness of her wrath and the weakness of her means of vengeance, “almost inclined to turn atheist.” I suppose that no parent is responsible for her opinion about her children, but if you were going to give a luncheon next week and my invitation depended upon my attitude toward you, I could not, with composure, stand by and hear you proclaim with an air of satisfied vanity, of your little girl, “She is the vainest thing; takes half an hour to tie her hair ribbon.” Nor can I understand why the neck of arrogance should be reared, because a child is obstinate or makes impertinent speeches. These evidences of talent, if, indeed, the parent is not too modest to ascribe them to her own strongly marked individuality, are traced with exultation to some ancestor, and you will see an otherwise sensible woman put on the manner of a newly bathed canary, upon some outburst of passion from her little Henry, and declare, “Dear me! his uncle, the Admiral, all over. I can almost hear him speak!” But it is fair to say of the baby that he does not speak. Did he speak, I am sure his

mamma would put her hands to her pretty ears. Of course, in other people's children these resemblances are not traced with such enthusiasm, but are regarded as offences to be expiated by long terms in state's prison. But, speaking of our own children and other people's children, "Oh! the difference to me!" as Wordsworth put it in a familiar poem.

In her simple and utterly-without-malice way, Jane took occasion to misconstrue the apologetic Touchstone, in conversing with one of these infatuated parents who was lauding the exploits of her offspring, and she let fall softly, "A poor thing, my Lords, but mine own." And, since we are out for disagreeable people, let me present you to those who are of a self-satisfaction that is even more difficult to submit to.

When we have bought a piano from the same manufacturer, at the same price, I do not like my neighbour to speak of her purchase as the superior instrument, because the agent was thankful to get it into her house as an advertisement, and so presented her with one of a higher grade than mine. The inference that our unaffected domicile does not, from a commercial point of view, possess the advantages of her larger, more hospitable mansion, is not pleasing to my pride. "A little sharp, you notice, in the upper octaves, I think," she is good enough to say of my Steinway. "But the agent knew my sensitive ear, and then, too,—I can't see

why, I am sure,—but this house is such a rendezvous for all sorts of people.”

And, as we live side by side, I do not like her to say that she gets all the sun, “as you know.” I do not know, but I am forced to have the appearance of knowing, rather than gratify her by losing my air of statuesque calm which, a common friend tells me, excites in her impotent rage.

I also number among my acquaintances a lady who is possessed with such admiration for what is hers, that, though herself a great aristocrat, when her son married beneath him, she at once adopted the new daughter as her own, and found for her a pedigree, which she has framed and hung in a conspicuous place in her drawing-room, lowering her own proud crest before that of her who was supposed to be without that ornament. “Of course, your know she is a C——?” And then she breathes a name before which lesser flags drop their pennons.

This able woman, when she discovers a defect in a vase that she has just bought, sheds no vain tears, but pronounces it an irregularity significant of the fact that it is “handmade.” And if the new rug refuses to assume the manner of rugs, and is crooked, and wider in the middle than at either end, this, too, is but a proof of preciousness and originality of device. “I regard it,” she was known to say of a Persian bit that looked like a camel’s hump, “I regard it as I would a signed artist’s proof.”

I am almost ashamed to speak of sickness again, for, looking over this volume, I see so many references to it. And yet sickness has so great a part in the list of things that we are proud of—not only our own illnesses, but those of others with whom we claim kinship or intimacy—that I cannot ignore it. It is human to assume that a severe illness is a virtue, and that the loss of an appendix should be as much a source of arrogance as was the loss of his burden to Christian in the “Pilgrim’s Progress.” Janet’s mamma bore, but recently, the fatigues of having a dress fitted, on the sultriest of days, because during that process the dressmaker related the details of her father’s recent attack of asthma. It was a subject of pride to have a dressmaker who had a parent who stood in the doorway with his tongue hanging out while five doctors worked on him. Three of these doctors prepared the family for the worst by assuring them that, if he did get well, he “wouldn’t be any use to himself,” but would probably emerge from the situation fancying himself a bear or Julius Cæsar, or indulging in any one of the vagaries which, had they recovered, sick people would certainly have insisted on—to the shame of the survivors. To have such a connection, I repeat, gave Janet’s mamma the same sort of distinction that she felt when she slept in the bed once occupied by Charles I. Pride, even in vicarious suffering, is perfectly natural, and though such a father—in such a situation—was not

given to Jane or me, still we were the flower upon which the surcharged clóud shed its moisture. The refreshment was not of ourselves, but we enjoyed its bounty. We were not the rose, but we came within a needle's prick of it.

Then we glory in our own personal peculiarities, and even in our relations' peculiarities. Last time I took tea with you, reader, you insinuated your superiority to your kind because you never eat butter. Not that you asserted that a fondness for this article of food is, in itself, degenerating; but you would have me think that you are not as others, and have your eccentricities. An aversion to milk or sugar in one's coffee,—a faintness from the odour of strawberries, a dislike to vanilla as a seasoning,—have done more to make people conceited than the retention of their baptismal innocence. To go further—I have seen a person give herself airs because she had an aunt-in-law who had a horror of cats, and had convulsions when approached by one. And to prove what I say about this peculiar form of vanity, I will confess to you that I had a sense of superiority to my neighbours because, last spring, I had a guest who swallowed a darning-needle. A feat of so unusual a character presupposed a visitor with a mouth of unusual proportions, and a physician of exceptional skill, to restore this implement of industry to its original use; and, though affecting indifference, both Jane and I were not without arrogance in harbour-

ing so rare an invalid. Of course, a thoughtful person cannot help running this peculiarity of human nature to earth, and trying to find out why we are proud of our eccentricities, regardless of the fact that they do not militate to our well-being, or augment our good looks. There are some doughty spirits that so accept misfortune. That brave lady we've all heard about, who was taunted with the fact that her second cousin had twice served a term in State prison. But her enemies did not know the warrior that hid behind the white apron. "If it had been *your* cousin," she said, "he'd have never got out to commit the second murder."

Now a single confidence the more. There is one paramount claim to superiorities on account of personal belongings, before which the proud possessor of a disease or a twisted rug or a broken bit of china, or even an antipathy to some innocuous thing, sinks into insignificance. In a sentence—there is no pride like the pride in cellars. Our rooms may be small, we are a little family, the pantry is not soul-satisfying, but the cellar! It is so dry that consumptives go down there instead of taking an expensive journey to California. It is so cool in summer that the family stay at home, rather than seek foreign and unknown mountainous climes, and pass their solstice in its depths, playing cards and amusing themselves. In winter, people raise bulbs and babies in its benign atmosphere. As for devotions—well, a friend car-

ried Jane and me down cellar in her new house the other day, and there was such a breadth of tiled floor, such a cathedral-like vault, that we felt solemn, and thought of suggesting it for the new church, instead of carrying out that Tudor-Gothic idea of a place of worship, to which is attached a lean-to, comprising a kitchen, a laundry and a gymnasium; a work that, seen on paper—we have regarded, as did the great Doctor Johnson the dome of St. Paul's—"with respect, if not comprehension."

XVIII

One's Relations

THE attitude of those who have relations to those who have none is that of unmixed superiority. The feeling is that it is shiftless not to have relations, just as it is shiftless not to like Irish potatoes. And undoubtedly relations are a protection. However much we may dislike our Uncle Thomas, we would not want to see him in state's prison, and when Cousin Camilla is defamed, the common blood in our veins tingles.

But a relation is one with whose disposition and even whose character we use a certain liberty. We protect her against the world, but not against ourselves. When relations displease us, we do not wish to remit the punishment, but we insist upon being ourselves the executioner. The world has progressed, but not so far, I think, that it is safe to abuse a sister to a brother, or an aunt to a niece. Perhaps in the age of perfect justice and candour, which is fast approaching, this liberty will be exercised; but just now, when Mrs. Smith complains of her Uncle John's conduct of the family estate, Jane and I,

while we assume an attitude of sympathy, do not join in the condemnation, but rather pay a wary tribute to the business qualities of the lady's distinguished house. What people will resent, and what they will not resent, is worth the study of a metaphysician; but it is pretty safe to say that abuse of one's relations is an employment in which one may exercise one's self without assistance.

These remarks may be complained of as commonplace, but they are not without their soundness or appropriateness. We have seen an affectionate, but bewildered groom thrown into a state of hurt astonishment because, when he alluded to an aunt of his bride as "that crafty and ill-natured old woman," adding: "Well, she shall never come here, I will see to that!" his lady flew into a passion, and gave dark hints that, if he did not like her people, well, she would go back to her mamma. "But you, my dear, you yourself told me——" "And suppose I did? I never pretended that she was an angel, but I know she is quite as good as your Cousin Ann."

This, the inexperienced person will say is not argument, but it has all the weight of reasoning the most convincing.

The bride was offended, and the groom made peace at the cost of an invitation from his own lips to the objectionable Aunt Matilda. And in justice to masculine denseness of perception, and bulldog tenacity of impression, it must be added that, although he

outwardly yielded, this opinion of Aunt Matilda did not change with acquaintance. She was always to him the "ill-natured old woman," pictured by his fiancée in the early days when they shared every thought. For, while it is well for the confidant to preserve a non-committal front when the confider serves up her relations on hot toast, it is well, on the other hand, for her to remember that she is making an impression, though an astute listener will not betray the fact. The trouble is that when one complains to one's husband of one's relations the creature, who is by nature deprived of imagination and is mentally and through training entirely literal, supposes that because our Aunt Matilda criticised our conduct at the ball, or our Cousin Amelia left us out of her house party, our resentment will take the form of an open breach, judging, as he will explain, from the feelings we express concerning them. He does not understand, nor do I believe he is capable of understanding, that ebullitions of disapprobation are our form of letting off steam, and that having called our Aunt Matilda—well, having called our Aunt Matilda an old cat, and our cousin a time-server, we have really injured them to the top of our bent, and are quite willing to have them in to tea, and to go with them to the dressmaker's.

On account, then, of the hopeless incapacity of the other sex to divine this delicate mental condition, I would counsel all young married people, when in-

censed against their relations, to write a letter about them, and then destroy it. This will afford a safety valve, and burned letters do not have to be explained away. Alphonzo will not retain the faintest memory of Cousin Camilla, whom his Sophronia loves; but he will keep every fragment of the conversation in which Aunt Matilda figured as the enemy of rodents, and when the latter is in town for a day, and anxious to see her dear niece, will present the record, written out upon a fair piece of paper, and daring the partner of his life to deny any statement upon its incontrovertible page, he will forbid an affectionate aunt the house.

Now that it is understood that we are for relations, considering them a part of a well-regulated household, and approaching the value of "My cousin, the General," and "My great-uncle, the Senator," we feel freer to speak of some little inconveniences attending their possession. She who is under a servile fear of another is the slave of that other, and can never know real happiness till the tyrant is removed. And yet all of us who are not foundlings are under just such bondage, and make a fetich of some vague figure whose lineaments we are not very familiar with, and yet who exercises over us a strange but irresistible influence. For example: I never prepare to take a step pleasing to myself (but for that reason to be looked on with suspicion) that I do not see looming up before me the ample figure

and the magisterial front of a relation who is known in the connection as "your Cousin Paulina." In truth, she who addresses you has not seen this impressive personage since her youth, but, perhaps from the fact that her sway has extended through two generations, I am subtly conscious that in some inexplicable way "Cousin Paulina" knows what I am about, and in each crisis I am impelled to ask myself the question, "What would Cousin Paulina think of it?" And it is another feature of the case that she always turns a glance of chilling disapprobation upon any particularly agreeable scheme, and though I do not go so far as to say she arrests its fulfilment, I do say she takes from it the elemental joy.

And not only does this intangible influence impress itself upon a but too yielding character. Self-sustained independent minds are affected by her opinion. But lately I was standing on my stoop, planning with singular light-heartedness a scheme in which a common relation of my Cousin Paulina and myself was to take part, when suddenly she paused, hesitated, and the fatal question framed itself upon her lips. "But, do you think Cousin Paulina would approve?" It is true we got no answer: Cousin Paulina is in California, but the disapprobation had been suggested, and the charm had fled. A foundling could not with propriety refer to her cousin, the Duchess of Marlborough, nor to her grandfather, "the Governor"; but then she would never have to

consider her Cousin Paulina. I hope I have expressed my disapprobation of this undetached class of persons, but I intimate that even obscurity has its compensations.

In this wholesale commendation of relations, I suppose it is understood that it is of one's own relations I speak. When it comes to that artificial relationship which is established by marriage, there is little to say. As has been intimated in many places and at many times, an orphan in wealthy circumstances is the prize upon which every affectionate mother should bid her child fix its ambition. A great deal has been said about mothers-in-law, but very little is done, probably because a mother-in-law has not that quality of self-effacement which is said to be the characteristic of the real parent. And yet there are instances when a mother has been willing to be blotted out to effect a union between her son and an heiress. "I understand that she objects to a mother-in-law," says the Dowager Lady Strafford, writing to her son whose marriage with the homely, but vastly rich Miss Trotman, she was endeavouring to further, "so pretend that I am dead, and I will do my best not to undeceive her."

The disposition, however, to criticise law relations is so human, so inherent, that I know you will thank me for a suggestion that all intelligent persons entering families may avail themselves of. I cribbed it from the moral pages of Augustus J. C. Hare, whose

"Memorials of a Quiet Life" has rested with "Drops of Dew" and other spiritual refreshments upon many a bedside table, and stimulated to a higher life. A noble English lady, having married into a family where the living were worshipped, and even the departed spoken of with respect, found her enforced silence burdensome to the degree that she resorted to the following device: "Finding that he could not bear that I find fault with any of his kin, however remote, I offered to compromise with him. I told him if he would give me his great-grandfather I would spare the rest."

It seems to Jane and me that a fairer proposition was never made; for it is often not the individual we complain of, but the condition, which forces us into unnatural relations with people whom we may learn to like, but whom custom requires us to like, whatever the difference in bringing up, education, and general ideas. Perhaps, then, instead of persuading your Alphonzo to care for Aunt Matilda, you will give her to him to serve as he will, and for your own part be content with his fascinating Cousin Maude, who was really more like a sister than a cousin to him before his marriage.

"Nil nisi"—but there are circumstances when it is necessary. Deceased relations would be safe from all criticism if only their progeny would not talk about them and bring them into disrepute. Not one disrespectful syllable would ever tarnish the

fair fame of that benefactor of his country, your great-great-grandfather, the Signer, nor of that other pillar of your house, the Chief Justice, if only you refrained from introducing them uninvited into our society, and did not force us to hear the story of their distinguished talents and, through inference, yours, their descendant's.

Not that I think you consciously guilty of impiety, dear lady, but in your well-meant effort to explain to totally uninterested parties how you came by your proud title of Colonial Dame, you have thrust your ancestor into our presence, and compelled us, in moments of freedom, when your back is turned, to speak of him as "that insufferable old bore." And were he permitted to speak, how he would writhe and twist under the epithet, your ancestor, the silver-tongued, the exquisite, who was so particular about the company he kept, so haughty in his mien. If you must do injustice to some one of your relations, choose your Aunt Matilda, who, I understand, has weapons of her own with which to retaliate, but spare the Chief Justice and the Signer, who really deserve better of this generation than to be known as "Mrs. ———'s everlasting old grandfathers."

XIX

Friendship

JANE and Janet's mamma have given a great deal of thought to the subject of friendship. We believe in it, we think very little else is worth while, and yet we have seen it die, and that from no especial breach between friends, but from ennui. And the cause of this weariness of the society in which we once took pleasure is, I think, in some instances explained by the fact that people do not become friendly through selection, and a mutual drawing to each other, but because they find it easy and convenient to associate. Nothing can be more alluring than an intimacy between neighbours, especially if they move in the same circle of society. A neighbour's house is a sort of refuge. Under the present scrupulous régime, when it is wicked and silly to tell a social fib, we go through the form of being "next door," when the chairman of the refreshment committee calls to know what we would be happy and thankful to donate to the entertainment for the benefit of orphans in Afghanistan. Not even the spotless integrity of Seraphina is stained

when she says "Not at home." I shall, for more reasons than one, never call the roof of my neighbour's third story "home." And besides, when one has an empty half hour, what more grateful than a chat in a teagown in which one has just "slipped over," with a person with whom we have friends in common and who, when we speak of "the dinner," knows exactly what dinner, or of "Mrs. Smith's sleeves," exactly what "Mrs. Smith's sleeves."

Alas! but it is true that common dressmakers, or even common acquaintances, are not firm foundations for friendship. People may see each other every day and not know one instant's community of thought or feeling—"not," as Schopenhauer says, "a fleeting glance of recognition in another's soul of a fundamental likeness to our own."

And the awakening comes about in so natural a way that it is like a surgical operation, beautiful and stimulating. Propinquity has allowed us to cast off those protective measures by which society guards against familiarity; and one fine morning the friend who has been made a friend because our houses adjoin, comes in, unasked, upon another visitor whom she happens not to know, and in whose interests she has no part. The effect of her presence is that of a relation at a dinner party. The side of us, the intellectual side, the ethical, the poetical side, it may be, that side which is our better part, she has never known, and her "Don't mind me, I am at home,"

while perfectly true and justifiable under the circumstances, suddenly awakes in us a cold chill of repulsion. We were perhaps talking about the "*Récit d'une Sœur*," and when she came in were quoting that inimitable passage in which Alexandrine, at Albert's grave, tells her heart to his sister. But the friend, made through propinquity, has never seen us in this mood and stares at us with curious, scrutinising eyes, the kind of eyes with which a rogue would look at another rogue whom he surprised preaching in cassock and surplice. The shock of discovery is as great on one side as on the other. We find that never could we have spoken to her as we were just speaking, and she is puzzled, distrustful. Is her friend a poseur, and is this the sort of thing she does behind her back?

Sometimes, after a revelation like this, two people hold on to each other lest they sin against loyalty, and then comes the strain that one day will break the bond. For my part, I can give you no advice but to say "Move, or wear her as you would a hair shirt." And, while we are on this melancholy subject, one might remark that the falling-off of friendship is often due to the fact that we are not content to be her friend, we must be her saviour. People have gotten in the habit of using as much slang about friendship as about teaching. They talk about being "illuminating," "helpful"; they do not think they have fulfilled the demands of affection

unless they have assumed the rôle of guardian angel. The friend wants you to know her friends, to read her favourite authors even—for there are friendships that are as well for the body as for the soul,—to employ her own dressmakers and her own doctors. Jane, at one period of her career, went about with what you and I would call a duster round her neck, a grey-green duster at that, and a long, formless wrapper that gave her the appearance of a bolster from which the feathers had dropped, because her long, svelte, Blessed Demoiselle of a bosom friend had taken a fancy to wear Liberty things. For myself, my intimacy came near costing me dear. I had a friend who appeared one day with five grains of arsenic which she told me she had resolved to administer at one dose, not because her intentions were murderous, but because she fancied me pale, and had forgotten the precise prescription given her, under similar circumstances, by her unsurpassed physician.

Another strain on friendship is the way people require you to help their friends, who indeed are nothing to you, but whom they ask you to treat as if they were a combination of the virtues that drew the original parties together.

I may as well confess that Jane and I are the sort of people who are never at a loss to know our duty, because we have friends who do not hesitate to remind us of it. Sometimes they tell us what to do

over the telephone; sometimes we are attacked at the club, on the street. Sometimes orders are prefaced with flattery. It has happened that we have been told to subscribe to the education of a person in China who had professed a wish to discard Shintoism for Christianity—and had been told like this—“Knowing your piety, your signal zeal——” But oftener meaning is not overladen with flowers of metaphor. It was through the telephone that our particular friend informed us that *her* friends—the Misses Mills, such nice girls,—used to everything and now reduced,—had made up their minds that the way to make an easy, independent living, was to sell tea, privately, of course, and only to their friends or their friend’s friends. “You and Jane will, of course, get your tea henceforth from them,” came over the tube, not trippingly on the tongue, but with the voice of command. “And how much would we take? It would be the expensive kind, of course. The Mills girls could make nothing except on expensive teas.” Well, we took the tea. Elvira’s tone was that of one who did not in the least care what you did to *HER*. She was ready to bear all that, but she *was* sensitive about her friends. I said that we took the tea, and I may add that we probably took more tea and at a greater price than we had ever ordered before. And people met us on the street and asked if we had seen the Mills since they began to sell

tea—such nice girls, and so careful to keep up—flowers on the table and such linen. Of course, with such refined people no matter what they ate it was dainty and was properly served, but I noticed that nothing was said about what they drank. I therefore concluded that the Mills girls patronised a rival firm. For the tea was of a greenness that left its mark in the cup, of a bitterness that caused the lethargic John to inquire whether we were “looking out for things”—darkly suspecting Seraphina of her old chemical experiments, while Janet declared that she was glad it did taste so, for now mamma and Aunt Jane would give up an enervating feminine habit. Easier said than done. We had up to this time entertained the opinion that taxes were regular. They were unreliable as a this spring’s pullet in the matter of egg-laying, in comparison to the punctuality of the Mills girls, bearing their copperas-tasting decoction. Such nice girls, whom it was a privilege to help!

But the Mills would have been taken as the bitter drop with Elvira’s sweetness and more tea bought from one whose private character was a matter of indifference, and we should have saved the money by wearing last year’s hats (the Mills themselves have very pretty, entirely modish hats), had not another friend commanded us to buy our coffee from her friends, the Gills. What’s ‘in a name? Believe me, nothing, else I should have

given what these ladies called "Java and Mocha blend," and put up in neat, ladylike boxes, to the fastidious James and heard no more about it. But that which we call Mocha and Java does not smell the sweeter nor taste the more like coffee because these respectable titles are assigned to it. No matter what the merchant's position in society, or how anxious they are to be independent of their brother who wishes to marry—the La Guayra and Rio sold by them have their own taste and their own smell. From a craven fear lest, in her self-seeking, she prevent a person whom she does not know from wedding another person with whom she is equally unacquainted, Janet's mamma gave the Gills' coffee to the church fair and bought more. At present, not only is she clothed in her old hat, but she has a purely vicarious pleasure in seeing the Gills wear smart winter coats.

But what our friends made us do for their friends did not end here. We were told that it was our duty to patronise the Dennys. The Dennys had been very civil to our relation Belinda; she had accepted their hospitality and she now called upon her family to wipe out this debt. They were rich, but they cherished the sentiment that what they gave to the cause of religion should come out of their own self-sacrifice. They therefore set up a millinery establishment, the profits of which were to go to the religious instruction of a Turk who kept an Oriental

bazaar, and who, while professing a desire to abandon Mahometanism, was not at all clear as to which sect of Christianity he would adopt, his attitude depending a good deal upon a secret knowledge as to where the right people worshipped. To tell the truth, the Dennys' bonnets were not cheap, but there were those dinners eaten by our friend Belinda, there was the Dennys' sense of unexpiated sin, and, as Miss Priscilla remarked when she tried a particularly unbecoming bonnet on Jane,—“For what is so dear” (presumably the wily Turk's theological opinions) “we must pay dearly.” She said it in the manner of Saint Francis de Sales when he offered advice to his disciple Philothea.

The Falls, gratified by the sight of their native city arrayed in the head gear as obviously the work of one hand as Hamlet and Lear, and the expression of the individuality of three prim old ladies, then announced that they would make party costumes. Our tie with the Falls was that Jane had gone to Europe one summer on the steamer with their aunt, who was seasick and required my relation to sit by her in a stuffy cabin for a week and receive contradictory instructions concerning her will. Having seen dear Janet in a Falls confection copied out of *Harper's Bazar*, and looped up with myriads of little fringed bows, the thought of the artistic Miss Muriel Falls, a young man who had dined with us twice and gone so far as to ask the child whether she liked

caterpillar green for a sitting-room wall paper—betook himself across the way to a girl who is exceedingly unpopular with amateur merchants, but gets her things from Madame George.

The Falls' cousins frankly compelled patronage by a demand to be able to go to New York when they felt like it, and ordered their friends' friends to buy a deed without a name that looked like molasses candy, but produced a disease of a malignant nature resembling epilepsy.

These are a few of the things that militate against steady friendship between women. We take a good deal for granted when we expect Margaret and Maude to like each other just because both like Mary. We are many-sided and show one acquaintance one aspect of our nature, and another another. She who addresses you, though she would not term herself a complex character, has a friend who knows her on the shirt-waist side, another on the health question; there is an obscure and lonely lady, a little deaf and wholly lame, who knows her through her travels which she recounts on Sunday afternoons, and she has friends to whom she boldly talks theology. But it is no easy matter to explain this variety to the two friends whom she would make love each other because they both love her. She to whom I talk shirt waists has too her other sides, and, do I commend her to one whom I fancy would be congenial, I find that it is for me that she has reserved

this intimate matter and that with other people she talks psychology or displays social ambition. "Did you see G——, and didn't you hit it off exactly?" I eagerly demand. Alas! she did see G——, but—— More than once I have had the mortification of hearing one of the two people I would have brought together remark, in that suspicious way—you recognise it, ladies—as if she had been entrapped, "I dare say it was my fault, but I evidently did not attract your intimate friend, Mrs. Brown." Mrs. Brown had not exhibited her shirt-waist side.

There is another friendship. It is that which exists between married people, and I have come to the conclusion that the most perfect friendships of this difficult relation are those where the wife is older than the husband. A very young man, despising his youth and ardently desiring to be rid of its reproach, naturally admires what he does not possess. A woman of thirty appears a goddess of wisdom and a marvel of attainment to a boy of nineteen, and her maturity is the strongest appeal to his imagination. The knowledge of the world which he is shamefacedly conscious of lacking is hers through experience. Freshness to him is vealiness, and the gayety of heart of a girl of his own age jars upon his melancholy and romantic spirit. And then, my young gentleman does not win his prize without an effort. A very delicate, distant reference has been made to the way young ladies occasionally construe flippant

words from irresponsible youths. But a woman who has passed the Rubicon unmarried, or has married and become free again, really seldom wishes, unless forced by poverty, to re-enter the marriage state. A great many unseemly jests have been made on the subject of the re-marriage of widows and the willingness of maiden ladies to marry, but the fact is that most women, having made up their minds as to what their lives are going to be, and adjusted themselves to their responsibilities, shrink from the unknown. Therefore they are by no means to be gotten down by the first hard shaking. If a boy of twenty-five wants to marry a woman of forty, he has to swing on to the tree and agitate it with all his might and strength. Jane and I know a canny youth who sent word to his chum's mamma, at whose house he had been staying, that he had been drowned, warily choosing the day when she was giving a tea. Herself a mother, and entirely as a mother, the lady fainted, whereupon the lover ran in; and when she came to she found herself being soothed to happiness by reassuring words, uttered by a person upon whose stalwart shoulder she was—well, she was resting. As she had refused him, so she had foolishly told him, from dread of what people would say, the youth remarked to her, quoting Virginius, “ ‘ My own dear little girl, there is no way but this.’ Now that you have exhibited your feelings, you must have a right to express them.”

When I saw them the other day, I was reminded of a large, comfortable, grey cat, in whose society a spry and frisky kitten sported. She cast an indulgent eye on his pranks and one could see that he would fly to her in time of danger.

The fact is that winning an elderly bride is fraught with such excitement and promises so many adventures that men are spurred on to it as to boar-hunting or scaling the Matterhorn. Nor does the fear that he will lose his romance shadow the peace of the mature wife. People have warned him—she has warned him—that he will get tired. But the memory of that sharp, hard contest is fresh in his mind, and the determination not to verify another's "I told you so," keeps him up to his work. In the matter of devotion to his elderly spouse, he puts to shame the gallantry of the husband of the young wife, just as the stepmother, with her beautiful care and sympathy, utterly casts the natural mother into dark and profound obscurity.

And while we are on this subject, I might as well call your attention to the fact that the elderly brides get the poets, the novelists, the dreamers. Artists, especially, have a passion for marrying elderly women with whom they have been long on terms of friendship and whom they have become accustomed to. I recall a Florentine painter, an Adonis of a youth, who ran away with a mature governess who had contracted to teach a cross child, but re-

belled when it came to exercising two Skye terriers. She had been in the habit of making him tea when he went to her employer's palazzo, rainy afternoons, and afterwards putting on his coat and bidding him look out for an innocuous tickle that he had in his throat.

After their runaway (though I am sure I do not know what they ran from, unless, like Browning, it was from the two dogs; though, after all, it was not like Browning, for he was required to run away *with* a dog—and more—a dog that tried to bite him) Jane and I went to see them in their pretty villa in the Bella Sguardo. He was painting a portrait of an enchanting American girl, but that young miss might as well have rolled her eyes at the broken-nosed Mercury in the garden. The wife sat by and sewed on buttons, and now and then went out to look after a savoury little ragout which she was stewing on the kitchen stove. Her air was that of George Sand to Flaubert: “I too have been young and subject to indigestion; but all that is past, and you shall have your little recreations.”

In contemplating this couple and many others, where the happiness of marriage is founded upon friendship, and a sense of repose in the heart of the man, I have realised the wisdom of the canon of the Church of England, which forbids a man to marry his grandmother. Grandmothers have always been more popular with boys than mothers, and the

relation that my artist friend held to his wife irresistibly recalled that irresponsible but delightful relation. For to any wife her husband is a sort of a little boy, while, to an elderly wife, he is not a son whom she must train, but a grandson whom she may conscientiously spoil. Now that they have taken away original sin, it seems to me that a sensible man ought to substitute for that featherbed, a grandmotherly wife, who will make excuses for him and not attempt to regulate him. This is the friendship between married people which, it seems to me, is placed on a firm footing. The most experienced people tell me that the week after marriage no man has the slightest idea what his wife looks like. When women get lost, the police have the greatest difficulty in getting an accurate description of the missing one. When a husband is interrogated as to the colour of her eyes, "usual" springs to his lips; as to the form of her features, "ordinary" is on tap. Nor, in reading over the reports of these tragedies, have Jane and I ever found that a man could tell his wife's age. I hope you will excuse the phrase, but, even on these trying occasions, he is apt to speak of her as "the old lady."

And for examples of marital happiness—when the husband has not taken Shakespeare's advice—they are at your service, and they are generally the result of propinquity, of a cleverness in making little toothsome dainties, a trick of inquiring for "the

old trouble," which made Disraeli's fortune, and a tender understandingness, a grandmother-like trait. Here is Khadijah, twenty years lay between her and her inspired Mahomet, as many between Madame de Staël and the youthful Rocca, again as many between Lady Beaconsfield and the Premier of England. The elderly Eleanor buried her Henry and saw the fair Rosamonde beneath the sod, Diane de Poitiers wore black at fifty for her royal lover, who died at thirty-three. Madame de Maintenon was four years older than her Olympian spouse. "Dear Tetzy" was twice as old as Doctor Johnson. Madame Mohl, Mrs. Browning, George Eliot, Mrs. Kingsley, Mrs. Stevenson, the Empress Josephine, Lady Castlewood, Felicité de Touches, the Duchess de Carigliano, the Duchess de Langeais, Balzac's own Egeria, Madame Hanska—are they not all written in the book? It was to no blooming bride that the preface to the "Weir of Hermiston" was written, no young and ardent maid inspired "One Word More," or "At the Fireside." Those impassioned epistles, written by the camp-fire by the greatest of all soldiers, were addressed to a woman already faded and whose life was full to its brim in experiences in which he had no part. But, as was said by another man to another woman, between whose ages there was as great a difference as between the ages of Josephine and Napoleon, "This circumstance, taken by itself, might seem likely to

drive our lives asunder. It was, however, but an accident. It was essentially of no account. She stood, a commanding presence, between an accomplished past and a hopeful future."

Jane tells me that, in my enthusiasm in advocating the popular fad, that of letting the predominance of years be on the side of the woman, I have not sufficiently insisted upon certain qualities of friendship in marriage. I should have said, and I say it now, that people should like the same amusements, and, if possible, the same books. They should have companionship in each other. And yet the real friendships of life, even those married friendships which I so earnestly advocate, are founded upon structures which are at variance with all which I have said, and, were I troubled with narrow ideas about consistency, I would consign these remarks to the flames. Only the other day I happened upon two ladies of middle age who were visiting together. They called each other by their Christian names, but I doubt if at any instant in their lives they had felt the electric spark that makes us one. They had known each other from childhood, so there was no mysterious, debatable ground that either feared to tread upon; they had been to school together, and so spoken to each other of their faults and their unbecoming bonnets. They have a number of common friends, and they have this bond: they heartily dislike the same somewhat obtrusive family which

occupies a good deal of room in their local society. As to advice, each gives it with freedom, but seldom takes it. Fanny V—— thinks Mollie R—— cares a great deal too much for jewelry, and Mollie is of opinion that, should her friend adopt high-necked gowns, it would be more becoming, at her age. But does there come a time for friendship to show her cerulean hues, these women are to each other a prop and a stay. When Fanny V—— got varioloid, Mollie R—— shut herself up with her and defied the health officers. And that time, that dreadful time, when grief closed over one, her friend cut all other cords and, by main strength of will and indomitable purpose, carried her through. To be sure, these ladies disagree, and, being human, criticise each other, but the common-sense foundation of their relations prevents misunderstandings. And then there is nothing new to learn. Once I saw an old servant in tears because her mistress, a stern woman, was going to break up her establishment and would have no further need of Margaret. "But you have another home," I said; "and she was cross and exacting, you know it, Margaret." But Margaret did not cease to weep. "Ah, my lady! but you see I know her, and she knows me." Margaret had touched the spot. It is this perfect knowledge which prevents that dangerous readjustment known in friendship as "making up."

Nor do I believe that either time or absence

would destroy the equable friendship which exists between my two acquaintances. When they meet, though it has been six months since they saw each other, they will begin as Luis de Leon began his lecture, having been silenced by the Council for ten years, with, "As we were saying yesterday, confrères." "You and she are cousins," I said one day to a lady of one with whom she was intimate. "Oh, no! not relations, just fellow servants."

XX

Advice

MAKING confidences and giving advice are two of the most agreeable forms of social intercourse. Within the memory of persons still alive, it was thought becoming for all women to consult with a male relation upon whatever step they contemplated taking. There was a large, substantial, shadowy body, which one could best describe as like the vapourous hosts that used to appear above the wall of Constantinople at the siege of the capital, that was known in high life as "the Connection." When one was deprived by Providence of her natural protector (for so husbands and fathers in that far off time were termed), the Connection assumed the vacant place, and one or perhaps half of its representatives told her what to do. Widowed ladies used to travel long distances on the cars to hear whether their Cousin Thomas approved of sending the boys north, or to a State college, to complete their education. I was once an eavesdropper upon such a conference, where the matter on the table was the propriety of a young

lady's accepting an offer of marriage. It was done with the greatest propriety, and as only men were supposed to be present, no woman's name was called. The members of the commission were not the girl's near relations, but had married into the family or bore the same patronymic. From the uncomfortable position which I occupied, kneeling on the floor and peeping through the keyhole, I am prevented from making a minute report of the proceedings, but I learned that there was a blot on the escutcheon of the suitor's great-grandmother, her papa having been an overseer. Whereupon an old gentleman, who was for the match, said that the girl herself was nothing in particular, and had irregular features and a pert manner, an offset to any sort of grandmother, and, indeed, none at all. I hardly dare tell the rest of the story, but at this point an outraged lady threw open the door, rushed into the midst of the conference and announced that she had never intended to take their advice anyway, and that she should marry when she pleased and whom she pleased—to the admiration of her advisers, who liked women of spirit, and were very much afraid of them. The council had, however, whatever its result, taken place, and the decencies had been observed.

With the breaking of patriarchal bonds, and the ignoring of any relationship further than uncles and aunts, "the Connection" is no longer a power.

We are not obliged to consult it, nor does there seem to be any code, written or unwritten, that requires a "helpless" female, as we were once affectionately designated, to ask advice; yet advice *is* asked, and will continue to be asked, because it is a means of telling one's own story under the guise of obtaining the judgment of a wiser and better person. If, then, this demand for sympathy is called by an ingratiating title, surely no great harm is done. I have a friend who complains of people who, when she uses the innocent and unmeaning "How are you," not even following it with an interrogation point, take the trouble to stop and reply, "Very well." She says she never means them to reply, that she does not care how they are and that nobody does, that this greeting is a form of speech adopted by the concurrence of civilised nations, and that one has no right to take advantage of it. But Jane and I think differently. If the person to whom we address this—to us—innocuous remark, will even answer, "Not at all right about my head," and add "You have suffered with neuralgia; what did you do for it? And can you recommend a tonic?" we will listen respectfully and with interest. Even when it is put up clumsily in a liquid instead of in a neat capsule, we swallow this sort of flattery. The gift of advice is not grudgingly bestowed, even by a parsimonious soul.

Now to readers who know everything I suppose

it is unnecessary to drop more than this hint, but the subject has its fascinations. If one really wants to unload upon a somewhat suspicious friend, it can be done with length and effusion, if the burdened will only preface her remarks with "I have come to consult you." There is something so deferential in this beginning, such a confession of weakness on the part of the speaker, of strength on that of the hearer, that she will fall into the trap and listen with the deepest interest to what is said, following it to the long delayed and bitter end. And when, after many pros and cons, she proposes her doctor, her recipe, her dressmaker, if she even recounts what she did under circumstances that are not exactly similar, but under circumstances, why, the burdened one has only to look relieved and very, very thoughtful. It is not necessary to take advice, but it is always safe to ask it; and then, if you do not take it, ten to one that you won't be found out. People do not insist upon obedience, they only want that feeling of "having been of use."

Jane and I have not reached these cynical conclusions through the experiences of others. Soon after we moved into our neighbourhood a lady came running over without her hat, and in a great state of excitement. "You don't know me," she said, with the most charming and, it must be said, helpless little laugh, "but I know you. I have come over in the greatest distress. I am having some

people to dinner, and I do not know how to make the salad." We were sitting in front of the fire, and occupied—Jane with her crochet and I reading a novel of the *passé* Thackeray—and I should have said the moment before that we did not want to be disturbed. But somehow both were on our feet in a twinkling. Jane had run up to the third floor, and was searching in a precious manuscript book whose axioms were never disclosed to our best and dearest, we having inherited it from an unparalleled housewife of the old school. I had a harder task. I looked into my mind and tried to remember rules for salad, and was at least in the neighbourhood of success, for I brought out a plantation remedy for acute dyspepsia and local gout. She kept us for half an hour, and during that time managed to slip in a long anecdote about a cousin of hers who lives in Kansas City, and had experienced religion under a wandering fakir. When she left, Jane went with her to the door, and I heard this somewhat difficult person say: "Come over any time when we can help you, and be sure to boil——" The rest was about an elaborate dressing that is excellent if kept three weeks.

Returning to the drawing-room, Jane looked important. "I hope when she makes my salad——" "*Your* salad," interrupted Janet's mamma. "You don't suppose she is going to make *your* salad; why it calls for——" Never mind what it calls for; this

volume is not "The Perfect Housewife's Guide." That is another book, and, besides, it was not Jane's recipe I wanted to discuss, but my own. We two sisters, who had lived together in unity many years, sat opposite each other, faces inflamed, voices broken. We had permitted a stranger to set us by the ears about a rule for preparing a bit of lettuce.

Again the door-bell, and we had not time to readjust our features. Our cousin Belinda, who has long lived here, came in, and there was something in our attitude that did not displease her. "I saw Mrs. D—— coming out of your door just now. Did she run in to ask how to cut her Jimmy's hair, or to make bread? That's a way she has of scraping acquaintance." And then Belinda gave us to understand that Mrs. D—— combined in her own person the information of a professional cook and a barber. Still, though for the moment, we were abashed, I, myself, have always liked Mrs. D——. At least she thought it worth while to seem to wish our advice.

The habit of asking advice, an observant person will discover, then, accounts for the popularity of a good many people. We long puzzled over the social attraction an acquaintance of ours had for persons whom both Jane and I have found it hard to please. She is a determined sort of woman-executive, fond of her own way, which qualities militate against what we call charm. But she rides on the front seat of many a boxing-party, and is asked to

wedding breakfasts. By accident we found out that she takes no step without going to well-placed friends and saying, "Now what do you think about it? This is what I think, but I can't be happy without your approval." Now to make another unhappy is a responsibility, and the deferential insinuation is that she—it is sometimes he, the advised—has it in his power to take away so precious a thing by a word or a frown. It cannot be done; even if the judgment is a little against it, what matter, even you and I are not infallible. In fact, you and I give the suppliant our blessing, generally our approval. "She is a very sensible woman," we say; "she takes advice," which is not quite true, but true enough.

From a "wealthy past," as the poet calls it, Jane and I have culled the information that, on the whole, it is best always to agree with the adviser. Sometimes a conscientious scruple may disturb the counselled, when her sewing woman asks approval upon the purchase of a pianola, or a very timid, delicate, hard-worked school-teacher proposes to marry one whose habits are confirmed in inebriety; or when a friend wishes our blessing upon a toy pistol, which she finds her only son cannot live without. But even under these circumstances, conscience can be chloroformed with a safe "One cannot discount sentiment," "One's own intuitions are worth a good deal," and "There are two sides to every question." Then, if the plan turns out badly, you have not com-

mitted yourself; if well, there is an opportunity to look modest, and mention that you had been consulted.

Now Janet's mamma feels particularly empowered to talk about giving advice, because not once only, but twice, in a period of youth and enthusiasm, she advised people to marry without the consent of their parents. Both were dressmakers, and while sewing "the long white seam," two different persons at two different times confided their anxieties to a flattered sympathiser. To say that not once, but twice, this lady assisted those of her sex to descend ladders and escape paternal vigilance by night is to run the risk of losing your good opinion; but so it happened. At the end of two months both the counselled came back demanding divorces and needlework, and there was nothing for it but lawyers and a supply of extra clothing. And if her acquaintances were contemptuous of the appearance of Janet's mamma for the next few years, this, too, had to be endured. Counsel in these instances, not being wrapped up in "I am sure that sounds well, but you had best look deeply into it," or "With your opportunities you are prepared to judge," had to be followed by support, and she who had been prodigal of advice wore crooked seams and wrinkled backs until her victims were relieved by the law.

And there are other reasons beside self-preservation which should make us chary of giving counsel.

In Mrs. Oliphant's "Margaret Maitland" the old servant Deborah says: "What you think the right way most times turns out to be the wrong way, and when you make folks turn to the right when they are minded to turn to the left, it's most likely the left would have been the best way for them to travel after all. It's a queer tract of country here below, and everyone has to take his own chance in the long run." Those two angry, "I hope you are satisfied now" faces which confronted Janet's mamma, after they had followed her womanly advice, "All is well lost for love," and found that she spoke the literal truth, those two faces have emphasised Deborah's philosophy.

XXI

The Apology and the Woman who Stood Between

THEORETICALLY the apology is the only way to correct a wrong. A recantation is supposed to possess great ethical value, and it is the opportunity of the offended. In a book of religious intention (but the work, I think, of a rather economically inclined nature, and one who in a previous stage of existence had the job of marking down goods for the dull season's bargain counters), I read recently that one should not miss this great occasion for exercising a virtue. It reminded us that opportunities to do good works are rare; to do a good action for which we are not at once rewarded, rarer—and this is a practice which cuts off emolument at the other end. Charity meets with loud-mouthed applause; piety is respected; and yet, in both these popular ways, people try to balance accounts which are certainly not going to be paid twice over.

But an apology is a different matter. He who accepts one need have no quibbles about publishing the fact and losing the reward of those who do good in secret. For the sake of the offender, all must be

224 The Apology and the Woman

told. "She has confessed her fault," we say, "and we have forgiven her." And then we meet with a certain recompense. To be sure, the reward is like the position of Prince Albert in relation to the throne,—it is good, but not so good. Our part in the duet will be a part, but it will be the alto. Almost anybody to whom the interview is related will say: "Confessed, has she? How beautiful! how noble of her!" And then our time will come. "And it was nice of you, too, to excuse her."

Of course different people have different ideas of the value of their own goods, but this book which we have been reading is of opinion that it is well worth being injured and seeing the injurer flooded with sympathy and admiration, that we may have the satisfaction of hearing "You, too, deserve credit." But a conceited person would not probably consider that somewhat inferior compliment full compensation for defamation of character.

Now, circumstances in our lives have led Jane and me to think that people are kept from doing a good many agreeable things by a bugbear called "the day of reckoning." More than once I have choked and sputtered and come in danger of strangulation rather than relate an interesting anecdote about a person who, I knew, had methods of self-defence and would require me to recant, did my anecdote reach her. The truth is, we had a silly horror of apologising; we pictured a quivering of limb, a frog in the throat,

a sense of humiliation before it came out—"I am sorry." But the time arrived when we changed all that. Once a lady accused the most blameless of human beings of supplying her own table from the Soup Kitchen, of which she was a manager, and also of voting twice at an election where her most intimate friend was a candidate for president.

Though innocent of at least one of these charges, the defendant in this case had to be goaded on by friends to demand satisfaction and a withdrawal of the slander. I say slander, not slanders. And they held out an enticing opportunity to exercise that magnanimity which her friends felt lay deep hidden under a somewhat volatile exterior. "How beautiful it will be, how beautiful *you* will be, if you can really and truly forgive her." And though the injured one had a distaste for seeing a fellow being grovelling at her feet, the prospect of pulchritude, even moral pulchritude, had its effect. "Well, if she is really and truly penitent, I will forgive her." But she had her bad moments—the lady—she knew that she would be ashamed, embarrassed. It must be so hard for her enemy to recant, to humble herself, and she made a plan. She wrote a little note that she had all ready to slip into the apologist's hand, and these were the words inscribed therein: "Deny it. Under the circumstances a falsehood will be accepted as an apology." But I little knew my own special penitent. She had come, filled up

226 The Apology and the Woman

to the brim with contrition—well, was it contrition? You shall form your own opinion.

“Yes, she had said it, but she had heard it so generally in society from the best friends of her whom she had offended, that she had taken for granted that what everyone said and believed was true. In fact the gossip upon the subject had been so notorious that she had broken a life-long habit of reticence, and repeated what she had heard.”

The opportunity to be generous had by this time become so wide that I felt that it must water the entire list of my acquaintances. “Pray, say no more about it,” came to the injured one’s lips. “But *I must* say it,” insisted the penitent, “I must make any sacrifice to put things on their proper footing between us. About that voting business I was told——” A naked bough, shaking in the wind, could not have been more helpless than Janet’s mamma. When a person is really sorry there is no depth of humiliation that somebody must not reach. The story of the election was told—it was told with detail and clearness—and when it was over, she who addresses you found herself explaining that, though she had carefully avoided the temptation to cry “Aye” more than once, she had cried so loud that the echo had probably produced the impression of another vote. I need not add that no occasion presented itself when I had cause to use the artifice of the note. The apologist had come bent on telling

the unvarnished truth; and frankly, in future, when I feel myself in need of a scourge, I shall invite defamation and let the defamer apologise to me.

And then, there is an additional opportunity for the contrite. It gives one who is self-centred an opportunity to talk about herself. I have a friend, a charming woman, who is a trifle impatient of long-winded stories of other people's adventures. She says that they give her a mysterious disease she calls "the budge." But it chanced that there came to her ears a remark of an acquaintance who said that she had not paid her dressmaker, and that lady demanded that the slander be refuted, since it reflected on her business capacity and an inexorable law—"no bills."

The apologist came, sniffled; my friend waved her hand as if the past were a blackboard and she a teacher, effacing it with a wet sponge. Sniffing was succeeded by hysterics. My friend became a remedial agent and assumed the duties, though not the salary, of a trained nurse. No good. The patient pushed away the chloroform bottle, and required to be comforted, soothed. I was not there myself, but I infer that she required rocking before she would consent to the slightest symptoms of rally. Now Mahala Green, for it was she, is not accustomed to rock even herself, so I have sometimes permitted myself to smile when I pictured her performing this maternal office for a perfect stranger

228 The Apology and the Woman

who had injured her reputation. At last she recollected a magic phrase for which she is indebted to Janet's mamma—the coaxing, “Now don't cry. Sit up and tell me all about it.” Mahala Green is a poor listener, but, on this occasion, I am told that she varied absorbed attention with applying salvolatile for two mortal hours, while the apologist related the circumstances under which her last cook left her, and what she broke when they moved to Baltimore from Elicott City. When she arose she smiled a watery smile and said she felt better. But I do not myself see that Mahala Green's chance for “feeling better” was improved. “The next time,” Mahala said—not without bitterness—“it will be *I* who will say that *she* did not pay *her* dressmaker.”

Now for “The Woman who Stands Between.” Just now I opened a book, and between its leaves I saw a pressed violet. Both pages of the book were slightly stained, but the violet was utterly crushed out of semblance to itself. Then I recollected that for no sentimental reason had I placed the flower there, but to keep the pages apart. Its dilapidated condition at once suggested the appearance of individuals who serve a similar purpose, and she rose before me—the woman who stood between—in all her vivid, yet self-effacing, personality. Now the phrase—the woman who stood between—does not usually convey the impression of a crushed violet. I did not myself read the popular romance with this

title, but I gathered from a caustic remark of Jane's that in its pages she was depicted as a designing lady who interfered between married people. No such ill-intentioned person is in my mind when I allude to my woman. She is the individual who goes on errands, and is a messenger, so to speak, though she wears no uniform, and certainly receives no fees. It is she who explains things when friends, especially relations, fall out. She tells people what "is expected of them." "What is expected of you?" is an old lady in the brown silk dress and her hair combed over her ears, who can tell us, if she likes, when to go to bed; and makes us dine on the backs of fried chickens. She tells a brown Maggie Tulliver that she had best swap off those swarthy features for something blue and white, as is worn in the "Dodson family," for Aunt Pullet and Aunt Glegg both admire blond and azure, like their own hair and eyes.

A not brief career had led me to wonder why, in a kind world, the tasks assigned the messenger are not more agreeable. For instance, if you will pardon the intrusion into your society of my Aunt Caroline,—a most difficult person, with whom I cannot presume to put you *en rapport*,—when I have offended her, and the cessation of familiar hostilities has produced the feeling of flatness, known to the invalid when the doctor tells her that she is so well that he will come no more, then I send for

Fanny. And I preamble my coming demand with something like this: I tell her that my Aunt Caroline is my mother's sister, but she is very hard to get along with, and that, although I may have been in the wrong *this* time, and am very sorry, there is something that rises in my throat at the prospect of telling her so (this was before my interview with the penitent who accused me of duplicating my vote and appropriating soup tickets), and would she, Fanny, take the gracious office of peacemaker, praised in Scripture? And I intimate that should I, a poor creature, fail her, she will know where to look for her reward. "You know, Fanny," I say, "I am the most awkward creature in the world, but you, with your good sense and your tact——" With a comprehending look, I intimate that the effect of Fanny upon my Aunt Caroline will be as sunshine on a closed bud.

I do not know why the attribution of a quality which is a combination of insincerity and time-serving should be received by one supposed to possess it as the adroitest flattery, but this fact must be accepted like the major premise, without dispute, if you want to get anywhere. On Fanny it was fire on the tortoise's back. She is not tactful, but she is a kind, fussy soul, and the appeal to her piety and also to her *finesse* does the business.

Off she trots to my Aunt Caroline, who, to tell the truth, has also found the lack of her niece's

society more conducive to quiet than to diversion. When she returns, covered with little pricks that give her the appearance of a smallpox patient, she presents to me a horrid picture of what she has come through.

“I told her that you had been hasty, but that all the Browns were that, and had little self-control; and then and there she turned on me, and asked me how I dared abuse her sister’s child to her face, and did I think that she would take abuse in her own house, where at least she had a right to be? ‘The Browns, indeed!’ she said.” I cannot state that in the interview, as related by Fanny, the imputation of hastiness was removed from the character of the Browns by the conduct of the lady who bore that cognomen previous to marriage. But, I must add, that her defence of me touched the chord of kinship, and that I also turned on “The Woman who Stood Between.”

“When I asked you to go, it was not to say disagreeable things about me, or to my aunt about herself. The next time I shall do my own apologising.”

This threat is not perhaps carried out, for Fanny always comes in, as we say of cold ham, but I think I did not deceive her when I told her that she must look for her reward in another world. And since you say that you are interested in my Aunt Caroline and have always been in us, I will add that this

interference had the pleasing effect of bringing us together for the common purpose of reviling Fanny. The leaves of the book were faintly stained, but the violet was crushed.

They tell me that in love affairs the intermediary is more successful. That is, the third person having, with the best intentions in the world, repeated speeches and volunteered opinions, entirely alienates the principal parties and catches the ball on the rebound. I myself have seen a lady who told me that she learned to know the rich depths of her husband's heart when he was engaged to her intimate friend. She insinuated, of course, that these depths were unstirred at that time, though they became a raging torrent afterwards. It was under these circumstances that little Rosie soothed Clive Newcome. But in any case "The Woman who Stood Between," though if she be taken and the other left, she may not care, incurs the everlasting resentment of the lady whom she served. "If you are under the impression that you did anything to bring Dick and me together after our misunderstanding, I can tell you now you are mistaken. He'd have come back anyway." To whom was this remark addressed? It was addressed to me, and she who spoke, and I, both knew that there was a time when Dick had been toyed on to keep his situation by a bribe of a week at our country house, and that while he was helped first at table and listened to with re-

spect, he was made to feel that his sentiments were those of one afflicted with mental alienation, and that he would not be considered a sane man till he did "come back."

The most pathetic figure of the "Woman who Stood Between" is that of Fleda Vetch in Henry James' "Spoils of Poynton." You recollect that she stood between Owen and his mother, Owen and his intolerable betrothed, and then between Mrs. Gereth and Owen. And between herself and happiness there stood her conscience, which Mr. James has given to an English girl with all the virulence of his own Puritan ancestry.

If, by any chance, the eye of The Young Person should fall upon this page, will she permit me to say: Before you interfere read the "Spoils of Poynton," it will be to you a warning, this heart-breaking story of suffering and sacrifice, because one person projected herself into other's lives.

But Jane takes the task of apologist a little differently. She has in fact her own way, when sent upon these missions, and I have accompanied her, in a subordinate capacity. Now, this is Jane's way: "I hear that you say that Mrs. M—— is a very pretentious, wasteful, extravagant person, that she has set the march of the neighbourhood to a different time, and that no one can keep up with her; that she has been heard to say that only men servants are proper downstairs, and that decent people dine at half-past

234 The Apology and the Woman

eight. Now I am her friend and I want to do her justice, so I have come to tell you that that's all nonsense. She dines at seven, like the rest of us, and her hats do not come from Louise's. She is a hard-working, saving woman, and those bragging speeches of hers were all talk."

Of course, you may like such an apologist, but I, for myself, do not know. I have an idea that, if I had told little fibs like these, and wanted to be thought richer and more modish than I was, I would not care for Jane's "setting me right" by describing my real character.

Again, on another occasion, when Jane had been sent to an awe-inspiring individual, in behalf of a clinging creature who had offended her, she said: "I come to say to you that Mary Eliza is very sorry that she has made you angry. And you should not be, for at times the child is not quite responsible. She suffers from nervousness, and her head——" Jane puts her hand to her own forehead and makes a revealing gesture. Here, too, it is a matter of opinion, but somehow I can better bear the displeasure of one whose friendship, after all, is not necessary to my existence, than that allusion to my faculties which wipes out all responsibility. In fact, Jane was so pleased with the thorough success of her mission, the offended one being perfectly willing to pardon a deranged person, that I find her repeating

the terms of her apology, and even when she herself has had a tiff with a friend, I hear her say complacently: "I dare say that, when she did it, she was a little off." Shall we, then, do our own apologising? I think "*yes.*"

XXII

Grievances

THE reflections I am going to submit to you are founded on the memory of this remark of an acquaintance who but lately said to me, wiping her little periwinkles of eyes, "I am comparatively happy now, but when I think of all I have gone through, I could sit down and have a real good cry." Nor in my heart do I believe she would think it either exactly womanly or respectable to put her past behind her. A grievance, if it is a past grievance, gives dignity to the most prosaically comfortable present, while a present grievance is not without its palliations.

People with grievances, for one thing, have "to be braced." One friend has to take the part of valerian, one of quinine, one of St. Jacob's oil. And, although I tell myself that I will not go again to console with So and So because she sprained her ankle last spring, and never leave her without quoting that the repeated assertion of an insignificant fact tends to weaken and destroy the mind, go I do, with faithful pertinacity, and perhaps a bit of

charlotte-russe, although I know that if it were not the sprained ankle, it would be the twisted knee, or the hurt feelings, and that what she needs is not medicine, but wholesome neglect.

Another acquaintance is always in the deepest gloom from the anticipated departure of her cook. In vain she is told that her cook has discovered this somewhat transparent presagement of evil, and works upon her after the manner of the potter with his clay. Hers is a pleasant house—all the more pleasant for the presence of the passing Sally, whom even visitors look upon as poised in aërial flight; but its cheer is tempered by the reflection, after the most succulent mouthful: “Ah, well may you enjoy it now! For Sally, as I do not believe I mentioned it to you, will probably leave me next month.”

And Jane and I have still another friend to whom the weather is a source of misery. It is pitiable to see her when it is cold, and one goes equipped with Melville’s “Expeditions,” or Nansen’s “Voyages” to prove from the printed page that people have been colder. But I have found that those with grievances rather resent the idea that others have suffered greater miseries, and prefer to think of themselves like Niobe or Œdipus.

Other females count it as a virtue that the temperature, wherever it is, is apt to be “enervating.” A lady of the highest social position, to whom I now pay duty, tells me that her constant condition is that

of being "unnerved by the airlessness," and though the wind be blowing a nor'wester, this sensitive spirit discovers in it a "lack of life." Her husband has the look of an unwilling express messenger, for they pass their lives looking for a stimulating climate, and it is really miraculous when you come to think of the vapour baths, the furnaces, the kilns and cauldrons, the deserts, the steaming, they go through unscathed.

But I think that the most fashionable grievances are those which result from the effort to live in magnificence, and at the same time practise small economies. I know people who cling like a burr to the mere thought of a carriage and pair, and who speak of a husband who does not give his wife jewelry as having a mean nature, whose wails when the butter is out reach the next-door neighbour. Of course the feelings toward butter, of the cook of one who wears diamonds and drives in her coach, must be different from those of the domestic of her who walks, or takes a cab to save her best gown. Therefore it is to be expected that there will be prodigality in the first instance, where there will be a disposition to scrimp in the last.

But my friend, who has the conveyance and a strict eye for the way the butter goes, makes no such distinction. "There is no reason why, because Providence has blessed me with worldly goods (I am very fond of Mary—but I wish she would not

speaking of herself as selected by her Maker as a special pet and favourite, while others are understood to be obnoxious to Him) I should be the prey of every passerby, and I expect my groceries to go as far as if I had your income." And for want of an illustration Mary takes the nearest.

I think dear Mary Smith in "Cranford" loved to hoard string, and Mr. Gladstone wrote on backs of other people's letters to save paper; but these are not exactly economies, they are distinctions. The people this paper is holding up for reprobation are those who make a virtue of small worries, and give neither themselves nor others peace. "My lord," said Juliana in Mr. Pinero's play; "she bored me till I felt my scalp quivering. Do you know the feeling?" And my lord said "Yes."

And there are people with "feelings" which they describe as "my sensitive nature," who, when one has inquired whether they will have peas at dinner refuse, and afterward greet us with a stonewall offended-governess face.

This appearance, strange to say, seldom affects members of one's own sex who do not often entertain sentimental feelings toward each other, but renders genuinely unhappy husbands and sons who, although they cannot imagine why one should sulk over an unintentional slight, are always ready to believe their womenkind threatened with mysterious and hopeless diseases. An explanation is therefore

at once, and with the utmost humility, demanded and "Let me go for the doctor," urged in a beseeching manner, to be met with the reply: "It is not my health, it is my heart that is hurt. You never noticed that I had a headache."

I used to know a person who always alluded to this ailment as "one of my headaches," exactly as if it were a personal mark of distinction—a token of aristocratic lineage, or the power to write a sonnet. And yet it was none the less a grievance, and an excuse for not visiting old and refractory relations, or making sponge cake when "it was expected," of one for fairs and church festivals. Another acquaintance harboured a resentment against fate, that her front hair did not curl naturally, and was wont to ascribe the social mortifications of her life to the obduracy of her locks. Still another regarded herself as set apart among the accursed because her sister-in-law's porch had a southern exposure, while she endured a blighting northern wind. In vain one assured her that the sister-in-law's children were too stupid to know north from south, while hers spoke the foreign tongues from infancy; still the grievance remained.

And another friend heartily dislikes her next-door neighbour, and though longing to be quit of it, refuses to sell *her* a piece of property, because the neighbour wears bonnets too young for her. She tells me it is not the bonnets themselves that irritate,

but the disposition of a woman of that age to get herself up in such a rig. "Why, my dear," she exclaims with tears in her voice, "why, even I, twenty years younger, never wear violets, as much as dear George would have hated to have me look a frump." And though we insist that it is in strict accordance with the departed Admiral's wishes that the neighbour wears a curled front and lisse strings, as long as they both live, my acquaintance will cherish a grievance against the relict of her superior in rank.

Of course, people have little undefined grievances against others, which they would be ashamed to admit. Philip's Charlotte objected to the Little Sister, because she kept them all comfortable on their tiny income; and Laura disliked Pen's pen, his sole support. Those are natural enough. But for myself, I consider that of all who have grievances, the hardest to get along with are those who superintend the afflictions of others, and make it their business to do honour to "the departed"—other people's departed, as well as their own.

I have acquaintances whose object in life is to see that "proper respect" is shown by external observances. A soldier's widow violently reproached her man's colonel, because there was a dearth of plumes. "I had so hoped for plumes," she moaned. And she is not alone in her wail. There are people who mourn in cut jet spangles that make a jingle up the aisle, while there are those who manage to see

the doings of a frivolous world under two crêpe veils. The latter have the air of going off at any moment, but they generally stay to see that others do "what is to be expected."

I wonder if it would do to repeat to persons with perpetual grievances the Scotch aphorism: "Gravity is a mysterious carriage of the body, invented to cover the defects of the soul." I wonder, but I do not dare.

XXIII

Happiness

JANE says that one of these days, when she gets time, she is going to write an article on "The Things People are Proud of." Jane considers herself by way of being an authoress, because she is on the mortuary committee of the Colonial Dames, and, but lately, I heard her encourage the fainting heart of an aspirant for literary honours by the statement: "Why, there's nothing difficult about it. I've printed." She says that in the forthcoming treatise she is going to call the public's attention to a queer fact. We acknowledge without a blush that we are handsome, intelligent, rich—qualities that are only valuable as promoters of happiness; but to own that we have attained to the state is to own to a certain lack of sentiment—to a callousness and want of feeling. To have forgotten one's sufferings is to have resigned a claim to that deep and ardent nature that each of us—in her heart—would be thought to possess. A secret sorrow, hidden under a gay and brilliant ex-

terior, is a possession of the highest social importance. The happiness of society, says the philosopher, is based upon the pains of private and domestic experience, and so valuable is a past with its accompanying bitterness, that people are more pleased to be suspected of having one, than of being caught visiting the poor or saying their prayers.

In proof of this theory, Jane tells me that, for fun, she once laid a detaining hand on the arm of a healthy, portly, cheerful creature, proud of his wife, his children, and his income, and looking into his eyes murmured: "I know that to the world you appear happy. You laugh, you jest, you are witty and sarcastic; but I, an astute observer of human nature, I know that beneath that joyous exterior lurks a hidden, secret grief which you bravely cover. It may comfort you to think that one person in all the world knows you as you are, and respects the reticence of a strong nature."

And Jane says that instantly a surprised, but fatuous smile overspread his features. He pulled down his cuffs, and turned away. That stroke about reticence sealed his lips, but the sigh that issued from his voluminous shirt front would have sent off a man-of-war, and it said as plain as words could say: "I am indeed a much misunderstood man."

Nor is this device for making one's self popular apt to fail with women, who, Mallock says, should always have had a grief, but never a grievance, and

to be mistress of a sorrow, but never its servant. Stoutness, though it has not that outward appearance, has a tendency to produce an overflow of sentiment, and after forty, the woman is exceptional who is not willing to be credited with a past. I have seen very comfortable matrons, whose eyes took a far-away, dreamy gaze when Jane experimented with them by reading "Allan Percy's Son," or "Changes" aloud, and who looked stabbed did someone darkly hint at a wild cousin, who had gone away desperate, years and years ago, and had never been heard of more.

But the real truth known about unhappiness—I speak of unhappiness caused by restricted means, failure of recognition, disappointment in friendship or affection—that deeper anguish caused by the loss of those we love, I do not of course touch on—I think that the sentimentalist would come back from his investigations disappointed.

It is true that very young people suffer acutely; youth is tragedy's hour, and at times we have been very unhappy; at times we thought we were so, at times we wanted others to think we were so. But, difficult as is life by moments, it is not difficult by years. In a definite space sorrows grow dim, and pale, and we look about us in a sort of bewildered, half-angry surprise that such a dreadful thing has happened to us, that we have lived through it, and are indeed quite comfortable, and that though we may

have nothing particular or definite to make us so, we are as happy as most people.

Is this insensibility? I think not. It is simply a proof that happiness is pretty evenly distributed. For the struggle of living itself makes a sort of pleasurable excitement, and from past sorrows we extract a certain tender melancholy.

Jane used to have a lugubrious dressmaker whom she humoured, in the vain hope that, if she petted her, she would cut her back seams straight. When she wished to be particularly ingratiating, she repeated Longfellow's "The Day is Done and the Darkness," and let "Miss Beck" dwell on a secret grief which even now ate into her soul, which was that her parents were Methodists and prevented her from taking dancing lessons when she was young. For my part, I do not believe that any amount of dancing would have given the pure joy that Miss Beck has extracted from these symposiums with Jane, when she has been at liberty to vent her sorrows.

Other friends of ours take comfort in regretting broken crockery, gowns ruined in rainstorms, lost pieces of jewelry. My Aunt Caroline once lost a gold breastpin, a battered, worn article which—whatever its value through association, a mysterious acquired quality, but one which does not add to its intrinsic worth—did not bear "salable" upon its thin features. But during its absence it suffered a sea change—it attained the qualities of the Kohinoor.

My aunt compared it with our poor little things,—to their detriment,—and even intimated that it had been her intention to will it to Jane, as a return for having nursed her through an attack of sciatica.

One day John found the breastpin, and, simple soul, was about to return it to its stricken owner, had we not snatched it from his pleased, outstretched hand. Had he brought it back, a battered gold pin, and nothing more, our Aunt Caroline would have been justly offended, and our chance of inheriting a silver teapot, long promised, often retracted, would have gone forever.

“What makes you cry, Joe?” I asked a little boy. “I cry because I am miserbul.” “But what makes you miserable?” “I loves to be miserbul.”

Now the causes of unhappiness are sometimes obscure. People who get the most pity in the world are not the chief sufferers, and when it is bestowed, it is not always on the most pressing cause for sorrow. Our bitterest tears, our moments of sharpest pain, are given to complaints that have too much bare-faced self-love in them to be presented to our critical fellow-beings, or even to be recognised nakedly, before the bar of our own consciences. But though I believe in putting a brave front upon even serious troubles, I do not think that we ought to be afflicted with the necessity of seeming exuberantly cheerful. To be sure, poets have sung of the cheerful countenance; millionaires have married it. Who

does not welcome it when it leaps into the dining-room on a clear, sharp morning, when the normal breakfaster is huddled over the fire? It is like a cold hand thrust playfully down the collar. It is as inspiring as a quinine pill or a dose of calisaya bark. Who does not lift up the aching head, and carry it out of the room and hide it behind locked doors under a mass of pillows, when that compelling chirp calls "Cheer up!" "Are not the little birds singing, 'All's Well in the World'?" it asks in its thoughtful, arresting way. If I have not had my morning coffee, I can no more meet the cheerful countenance than a guilty conscience can meet its accuser.

The other day we were sitting by a low little fire in the parlour of an old country house—three old friends—who, such was our companionship, had no need of speech to hold communion. The tender light of the fading day cast long shadows on the hills; the little old-fashioned garden under the windows glowed in the sunset and turned wistful, flower-faces to its lingering caresses. It was peaceful, it was calm, it was well.

Suddenly the door flew open and the cheerful countenance projected itself into our midst. "What," the clear, clarion notes rung out, "what are you doing here hugging this wretched little blaze, when all the world outside is a glow of glory? No wonder you look dull. Come out! Come out with me into this fresh, bracing air! And you are

not even talking! Is it possible you haven't been introduced? Dear me! Mrs. M——, let me present Mr. G——, and you, Miss B——, surely you have *heard* of Mrs. ——? I thought nice people like you always knew each other!" The witching smile, the darting glance, how at home it made us all feel! And, on the strength of it, we all got up and bowed gravely to each other, the three old, old friends, who for so long had made the journey together, up hill and down. And all the windows flew open, and the doors sprang wide, and the little low fire, for very shame, died on the hearth, and the shivery blast rushed in. I defy microbes or mystery or melancholy to exist where beams the cheerful countenance.

And yet, I would not be frank if I did not warn you that she of the cheerful countenance is not without her own difficult moments. A cheerful person gets, after a while, a reputation which compels her to carry her cheerfulness into her own life. Not only has she to be "bright" about your headache and mine. She has to be "bright" about her own headache. But lately, Jane and I called at a house of mourning. It was a dreadful tragedy, and we went with sympathy and tears. But the one upon whom the grief had fallen was a "cheerful" person. There are a good many ways of making a fellow-being feel like one devoid of intellect, but I do not know a more reliable way than that of meeting the

friend who has come to condole with us with "Isn't it beautiful? Just as we would have had it, could we have chosen. Oh, yes! we are very happy about it and wouldn't have it different for the world." Unless one has experienced this sort of thing, a criticism of the extended hand and sparkling eye seems hypercritical. But the fact is that such a reception leaves the sympathiser very little to say. To agree with the assertion that "It is beautiful and better so" is certainly uncomplimentary. To drag the mourner back to earth is brutal. I said that such a reception makes one look like an imbecile, and I repeat it; and could the features be mirrored when they become devoid of intellect, their appearance would not tend to the increase of self-respect.

But Jane, who once, for a short time, adopted the cheerful countenance in an amateurish sort of way, tells me that it is not when one is in this kind of distress that one finds it most difficult to maintain cheerfulness, but when one is about to undergo a surgical operation. As no true soul at this period of the world's history would be willing to go through life without offering up some portion of her anatomy to the cause of science, one of the cheerful countenance must not only expect this experience, but, while enduring it, her gaiety must shine with effulgence. Doctors who, unlike their sex at large, are not without perception, having noticed this fact,

take advantage of it, with the result that, if the patient is not verging on hilarity when placed on the operating table, they profess to be unnerved. "There was a time," wailed poor Jane, "when one's one solace, when one was being cut up and dissected alive, was that one could be miserable about it. Then, at least, we could drink our fill of pity. People wept over us, ministers of the gospel read the Scriptures over us, friends brought the consoling jelly in little cut-glass bowls, even cynics said 'Let her cry, poor thing, it will do her good.' " But the cheerful countenance has changed all that, and its attitude has filtered down into the laity until, if one is to be deprived of a vital organ, the most natural thing in the world to say of her is—"She is, of course, the most cheerful person in the house." And if there is a moment when the flesh falters, up comes the trained nurse in stiff uniform and professional authority. "Really, you must keep up!" she says. "Think of the doctors—you must help them, don't think of yourself—that's morbid; think of *me*." Animated, then, by this inspiring topic—thoughts of the trained nurse—the poor creature goes to her doom, flags flying, arms waving, shouting encouragement to her medical staff, and calling "Be brave" to the operator. "I assure you," said Jane, "that the night before poor little Sally N—— was operated on for appendicitis they brought in a man six feet tall and three feet wide who was to

have his finger straightened, and asked her to 'hearten him up.' But then you see Sally had unwisely adopted the cult of looking cheerful under all circumstances."

Another reason why people are unhappy is that they have no realisation of the fact that to-day is the best of all days, and for us, maybe, the only day—and that happiness—to be stable—must be in the present. There was once a lady who could never make up her mind to eat a sound apple. She had that sense of the importance of to-morrow that led her to resist any pleasure that to-day might bring forth. So all the year round she munched the fruit which wrought our ruin, not in its pristine, tempting state, but with decayed bits in it. Nor need you mock at this unfortunate female, reader. Who, if not you, are promising yourself that when you are old and bedridden, you will go to the theatre every night, or when you have lost your complexion and your curls, you will have your bonnets from Pangat? That friend who, I am always telling you, has a paramount influence over our lives, has a secret industry in which she engages and which occupies her when we want her to take a walk in the autumn woods or sit out a lonesome twilight. For my part, I think it is writing lurid tales for the newspapers, of which she is properly ashamed, but Jane suspects her of discovering manuscripts that rehabilitate the character of Alexander VI. At any rate,

she spends all her superfluous time and energy on its accomplishment. And why? Because there is an unfurnished room in her compact little establishment. And her benefits, which she would otherwise dispense in royal fashion, are squandered that, in some future day, she may open the door and say "Behold."

And I have another friend who eats her frugal dinner with pewter forks, eats it with martyr-like patience, because some day she will save enough to have silver ones. In vain has Janet's mamma proffered plate, many a time expatiating on its decency. But a *pis aller* is despicable. With pewter she will eat or not at all, for there is no middle way for so valiant a soul. I do not, from motives of delicacy, like to tell her that another younger, fairer woman will probably enjoy the silver forks, when she has gone where forks are a superfluity, but I think it, all the same.

In fact my friend is one who makes a virtue of makeshifts and says that youth is the time that feeds upon itself and needs no extraneous aids to enjoyment. This is, of course, good philosophy if it is good sense. But that their cup is full is not the reason why people defer happiness. They defer it for several reasons, one being a subtle instinct to put off a keen enjoyment, as a child saves a bit of cake to "eat presently," a deferred pleasure being to the average intelligence an added pleasure; and others put it off

from the habit of depreciating the present. For the very reason that happiness is here, they push it aside.

Now, if I had to choose between living in the past and living in the future, I should live in the future. I know a thin little lady with very red eyelids, and a worn *crêpe* veil swathing her small shoulders, who never dwells upon the time when He used to tuck her under his arm for a brisk walk under the elms after office hours, or go with her to the milliner to buy a blue bonnet that exactly matched her dewy eyes. Her whole life is in the future, when her little son will leave his chair by the window and run out and play with other boys, when he will take care of her and make her again glad and proud of the name. You and I know that this cannot happen, and if she were wise, the dear thing would live now in his patient smile. And I know a little governess who, being without accomplishments or what is called "training," must, as far as I can see, spend the rest of her actual life being a hobby-horse for small, spoiled boys to ride on. But she who does not even own her little white bed lives one day in a pink brick house with marble colonnades, the next in a Venetian palace, the next in a farmhouse deep down in sylvan shades. I have no quarrel with her and her ignoring of the "now," or with the imagination which peoples her world with pleasures that reality would deny her.

But for ordinarily constituted, ordinarily placed people, I would commend the present. "He had a philosophy of life," says Mr. Howells of one he knew and loved, "which he liked to express with a vivid touch on his listener's shoulder. 'Put your finger on the present moment and enjoy it. It's the only one you've got or ever will have.'" One day I met a person who had been very unhappy, but, to my surprise, the once fretful face was sweet and clear. "What had she done?" "I have bathed my weary soul," she said, "in the delicious 'now,' " which meant that she had shut out the future and put the past behind her.

Now it seems to me that if one will be natural, if one will not affect a false cheerfulness which one does not feel, if one lives in to-day, there are few griefs that cannot be borne. The trammels of conventionality, the dread of being misunderstood, of being misconstrued, which is our greatest social bugbear, prevent people from showing the true state of their feelings. But let us imagine a society in which it is customary for those who have reconciled themselves to a trouble to show their condition of mind—how long would we shroud ourselves in garments of woe and banish ourselves from our kind? How long hide ourselves in darkened chambers? Would you really like to know? Well, you can draw an inference from the conduct of your little Tommy, whom you are instructed to watch as a

shining example. When little Tommy falls down he roars at first from the hurt, and are you standing by, exuding sympathy, respect, and rewards, he will continue to roar in the hope of the continuation of these emoluments. But should you leave the room, you will find that little Tommy will cease to wail and soon betake himself to his amusements.

If we were as miserable as conventionalities require us to be, life would indeed be insupportable and we would have a right to cry out against the inequalities of fate; but fate is not really unequal, for happiness is a matter of temperament, not of surroundings, and to those to whom she sends many things, difficult to be borne, she sends internal light.

The investigator then, having been out for unhappiness and brought back, after a day's hunting, two or three broken hearts and a bag full of wrinkles, the result of worry, ought to go on a crusade against that custom which requires the afflicted to cry out: "Here I and sorrow bide," when sorrow has really moved to the next house and "I" am sitting up and taking a little gruel. If it were the custom to treat grief as we treat a cut or a bruise, and take the same delight in its healing, we would sooner adjust ourselves to the universal experiences. A certain one who dwells in a sort of shady brightness tells me that the secret of her peace is a low horizon.

In the millennium people will be as proud of being happy as of having been economical, and that desirable period will be hastened a century or two, if we can make up our minds to appear as we really are.

XXIV

How Belinda Had the Grippe

THE other morning, to her own astonishment, and that of her friends, our relation, Belinda, woke up with a seizure of some kind which prevented her from rising, and forced her to the conclusion that she must have a doctor. Now this lady is an exceptionally healthy person. Not the most subservient of her flatterers could with any degree of propriety have ever spoken to her of her "highly wrought nervous organisation," or discovered in her symptoms of "brain fag." The day before she had played golf and bridge; nor had her colour faded, nor her appetite waned up to twelve o'clock of the night before.

"It is so long since I was ill that I really don't know what doctor to call in," she explained to her husband; "suppose we ask young M——. He is just home from Europe, and, they say, is most scientific. He graduated at Columbia and then at Johns Hopkins, and was two years in Vienna, and a year in Paris. As I am sick so seldom, I had better have the very best advice. Besides he is young and will

take an interest." And while awaiting his visit, my friend, assisted by advisory counsel, wrote down all her symptoms, lest, in the excitement of her novel experience, one might be forgotten, and even (this is a veracious chronicle) was old-fashioned enough to hunt up a pink silk dressing sack, a little small, to be sure, since it was constructed for her trousseau fifteen years before.

An hour later, a tall, spare, solemn young gentleman, with goggles over his eyes, entered the room. He wore a long clerical coat, and his cuffs extended over his hands, which were as white as an Easter lily, and terminated in manicured nails. "She was perfectly well yesterday, Doctor," said the henchman, assuming some of the air of importance which attaches itself to sickness, personal or vicarious; "but suddenly——" If she who had addressed him had been a ghost, and with voiceless accents and invisible presence had been endeavouring to make herself heard, she could not have met with less response. Walking to the spot at the farthest distance from the couch where Belinda reposed, the six feet of materialised mentality seated himself in a corner. where, had he only eyes, which Mr. Samuel Weller professed to be his sole way of seeing, he could not possibly have discerned his patient, picked up a copy of Jeffrey's "Story of my Heart," and began to talk about wild flowers. "I suppose," he said, in a voice from which all personality had been eliminated, so

260 How Belinda Had the Grippe

that one felt as if one was listening to a phonograph, "you care for wild flowers, Mrs.—Brown?"

"Well, yes," said Belinda a little doubtfully, "I suppose I do, but I'm not very fond of stooping down now that I am rather stout, and they fade, you know, when they are picked. I can't think, Doctor, how it happened. I ate my usual——" "Oh, I did not think of anyone's gathering them. There is a grace, a naturalness, a purity in their colour, which I do not perceive in cultivated flowers. Theocritus, speaking of the blue lilies——" "Perhaps, Doctor," Janet's mamma interrupted, to whom the idea had suddenly occurred that with his foreign education, he had mistaken the summons and fancied that he had been asked to "assist" at a "levée" of a fashionable lady, who received her friends like Madame de Bourbon, while she submitted to her hairdresser. "Perhaps you'd like to feel her pulse, or use the thermometer? Shall I raise the curtain?"

Was I indeed speaking with voiceless lips? The horrible idea flitted across my mind that existence itself was a fable, and that I had no outside reality. Not a muscle of the set features moved, not a quiver of the goggled orbs intimated that he had been addressed. Presently the long limbs unfolded, the spare form lifted itself; he was going toward the door. "But, Doctor," cried my poor friend imploringly, "I am real sick. My head aches and I'm sure I've got a fever. I can't take quinine. It's a

family peculiarity. I was Miss Carter before I was married—and—oh (addressing Janet's mamma imploringly)—can't you keep him?" The door closed softly, he was gone. Shadows we are, and shadows we pursue, as I found when I ran after him.

"Never mind," said the patient consolingly; "I might have known he would insult you. They always do. They never speak to anybody but the trained nurse. Doctor Franck called Molly Brown's mother 'that woman,' and when she asked him if Molly was going to get well, inquired whether she had read 'The Bee.' But just you call Tom, and I will get him to find out what I am to take."

Goaded to the task, and also endowed with a masculine theory that what you pay for you have a right to, Tom followed the scientist to his office. "Your wife," he extracted, "has had an attack of the prevailing grippe—been perfectly well till this morning? It is that which fixes me in my opinion. The most dangerous cases of grippe are those which do not manifest themselves. They have their correspondence in suppressed nerves. Had I seen her when she was perfectly well, I could have practiced my profession, which is preventive medicine. I only help those who are in a state of health. The malevolent forces must now struggle with the benevolent ones. Will she recover? Well, really—the fight is so interesting that——"

262 How Belinda Had the Grippe

When people come back from doctors' offices with faces as red as turkey-cock combs, and using language that disfigure print, I, for one, cease to report them.

"I shall not let another man doctor cross my threshold," declared Belinda, when this opinion was rashly unfolded to her. "Women are twice as sympathetic, and beside, I hate medicine. I will have in the osteopath." As it was, so to speak, Belinda's funeral, she got her way. A little, neat lady with brown eyes and the look of an intelligent sparrow, entered the sick room. "Now don't talk," she said; "for you will get all worked up. I know all about it, dear; that's the wonderful thing, the precious thing about having one of your very own sex to take care of you. We *know* because we have *experienced*. You are like a high-bred horse, that will go until he drops. Oh, yes! I understand, this has been coming on a long time, but with your wonderful sense of duty and your will, you just wouldn't give up. But you were well yesterday? No, dear, you *thought* you were well. That was your splendid woman's courage, but you weren't; you were all worn out. That shaky feeling and that difficulty in taking a long breath. And that dread of going anywhere alone. No? Oh, that was your power of resistance. You will have to give up all that and just sink, sink, relax. Will you be real brave about it and trust me when I tell you that all the sym-

pathies on the left side of your body are tied up and depressed? ”

“ If I had known that I had such dreadful things the matter with me,” said my poor friend, bursting into tears, “ I would never have had the heart to go to that card party. I’d have sent for Mary Deans and made her promise to marry Tom as soon as it was decent, so as to have somebody he don’t care about to take care of him and the children.”

“ Nonsense,” said Janet’s mamma stoutly, “ it’s nothing but your mind. I’m going for the mental scientist across the street.”

I must say that I do not approve of the moral effect of mental science. Belinda is a nice, sensible woman, with a self-respecting opinion of her own character; but when she got through with her physician, her conceit had become so exaggerated that we all had to become Christian scientists to be able to stand her. The exponent of that faith told her that her body was a cathedral, through which the aortal organ was sending its rhythmical energy; that it was a cosmos in miniature, an epitome of the universe, robing the offspring of the infinite. She told her that she had five temple gates, opening upon highways that extend to the world of form, and that she was a superlative example of co-operation. When I got back, having been asked to leave patient and physician alone together, lest I be a disturbing—or as they put it in their flattering way—a

264 How Belinda Had the Grippe

“ malevolent ” influence, Belinda was beating on her breast and calling out: “ Oh, my beautiful body, usurped by the flesh-man! Oh, my sensitive canvas upon which the healer has drawn lovely outlines, but which I have filled in with inharmonious colours! ”

Now, it is her complexion, not her outlines, that is Belinda’s fine point; her nose being what they called in the last century *retroussé*, and her cheekbones a trifle high. So when, with the candour of true friendship, Janet’s mamma indicated this obvious fact, and the scientist, in disgust at the presence of the “ deadly drug,” poured out an expensive hair tonic, besides asking five dollars for her complimentary diagnosis of Belinda’s “ shell,” she too was dismissed, for the headache held its own nor had the fever abated.

Then Belinda, who is of an impatient disposition and not used to sickness, made the world her advisory counsel. By night she had given a neighbour an interview, who declared that there were just two drugs she believed in, and they had been culled from an English newspaper; the English were so sincere, rough but beautifully sincere, and these were gold and granite and should be taken in capsules. We know how useful granite is by the way poultry crave it—and—why, everybody wants gold—the desire is universal. But to a soul fed on nectar like that administered by the mental scientist, a panacea that

helped chickens was rejected as insulting, nor was Belinda better pleased with a remedy that was applicable to the ordinary organism. Another visitor gave offence by suggesting that she was a trifle "hearty," so her prescription of grape juice and cold baths fell on deaf ears. A bowing acquaintance sent word that if glycerine tablets were substituted for sugar she would soon be well. A hop pillow and a suit of sanitary flannel came from a wealthy client of Tom's, and finally, Jane offered to boil water three times a day and bring it over, scalding hot; but this reflection upon the capacity of Belinda's own cook to perform a simple duty shut the doors on this philanthropist. "I am sure I would never have taken the liberty of speaking of it had Mrs. Brown continued even externally well," said Belinda's intimate friend, the slimness of whose figure has occasioned some heartburnings in one who professes to have "given up all that sort of thing" and rejoices in being "perfectly simple and natural." "But I never thought she stood properly. One should project the upper part of the body, stand firmly on the heels, and take in a deep mouthful of air. Then those stays—really, I do not believe dear Mrs. Brown ever draws a free breath." These remarks, it is proper to say, were addressed to Janet's mamma, but in Belinda's presence, her intimate friend having the queer but popular notion that somehow, as the invalid was bedridden, she

266 How Belinda Had the Grippe

was partially deaf, and would hear only as much as it was intended that she should hear. At any rate, since the opinion thus frankly expressed had evidently been long harboured, whether Belinda ever got a free breath or not, may be debated; but not that for once her visitor had enjoyed that privilege. For myself, though I admired her courage, I own a shiver passed over me. That reference to "stays"—would it ever be wiped out? Speaking with knowledge acquired after the event, I am at liberty to say "no." This, I take it, was the amateur practitioner's last opportunity to see how Belinda draped the curtains in her upstairs sitting-room.

I hardly like to admit that it was with something like relief, in the midst of these lacerated feelings, these gymnastics, these capsules, these innocuous juices, that I heard the jarring, but cheerful tones of Belinda's husband in the hall below. "Come up, Doctor," it called out. "Here you are, Belinda, I've brought you the real article this time, saddlebags and all"; and, "like a ghost from the tomb," in walked the exponent of the extinct theory of allopathic orthodoxy.

"These systems, my dear lady," remarked the last survivor of his school, while he mixed a bitter draught with his own plump hands, are "ancillary to science, unauthorised, indeed, but not hostile. Grape juice, gold dust, poisoning one foot in the air

and putting all the weight on the other, are not injurious to the human frame, unless too long persisted in. However, if you want to get up to-morrow——” “I do,” said Belinda with a solemnity that she had not employed while making her marriage vow, and she swallowed the dose.

XXV

The Cult of Being Busy

CUSTOMS change. In our time people aimed at having an air of leisure. I remember that, when very respectable people had an eye to their own preserving and jellying, it was considered the height of decorum to leave the kettle at the boiling point and enter the parlour with the manner of having laid down Tennyson's "Idylls" or a tea-cloth which one was embroidering as a legacy for one's grandchildren. But now it is the fashion to be busy, and it was in our little street, and comparatively recently, that our belated perceptions took in the mode.

For three years we have watched the little lady across the way, who has sat in dull placidity at her window, looking into the quiet place that, at its gayest, is enlivened by a perambulator or the visit of the policeman to the backdoor of decent red-brick houses. Sometimes, Christmas times, she has crocheted, and once Jane saw a green volume which she declared had the look of "The Broken Troth" slide off her knees. Hers was an empty life, we

thought with sentiment, having formed our opinion from the scrutinising, but not unfriendly, glances that we had cast upon it; and when a friend told us that, having changed one's hair from brown to gold, it took every minute of a normal intelligence to keep it of a uniform colour, we seriously thought of buying a bottle of this occupying material and sending it to our neighbour (anonymously, of course,) to help her pass her time. What, then, was our surprise when, the other day, we met her on the corner, to hear her break out with: "So glad to see you,—been wanting to call, but one is so dreadfully busy. Every minute taken up, things piling upon one, things one simply can't neglect! Do come to see me without waiting, for I somehow feel that you two always have so little to do. Well, I must run. Good-bye! *Good-bye!*" The flutter of her little grey gown created a gentle breeze as she flitted around the boxpost, and Jane, who is of a sanguine cast of mind, went home and told Janet that the middle-aged lawyer who called Sunday afternoons had spoken, and that the little lady was getting her wedding-clothes.

And then on the heels of her, a bustling young matron, the mother of the person who rolls up and down in the perambulator, woke the echoes in our drawing-room by descending upon it like a troop of horses upon a slow-moving caravan. "I just ran in for a moment; such a rush, going from morning

till night, not a moment one can call one's own, owing everybody visits, social obligations that simply can't be put off. How perfectly sweet and restful it is here! Such peace! Such quiet! Well, I suppose I shouldn't envy you, but I just do."

Janet's mamma adjusted her mental eyeglasses. No, her vision had not deceived her. This was the ambitious, hearty young person who went down town when there was an extra sheet of advertisements in the morning paper, and who called it spring and fall when her costumes, appropriate to those seasons, came home. The tribute to our own deserted mansion and our own empty hands contrasted with the overflowing tide of work and pleasure that had swept over our neighbours, somehow, was not as gratifying as an inexperienced person would suppose. "Jane," said she who addresses you, "Jane, Mrs. M—— has turned out to be a pretentious, giddy sort of creature. I pity her husband and her poor child."

And then it was going to church, or on some such worthy errand, that I came upon an old friend with whom Jane and I had gone to school, and in consequence could never be made to believe in her abilities, since during our intercourse she had not been able to acquire the art of committing to memory Mrs. Hemans' "I hear thee speak of the Better Land." "Glad to see you," she exclaimed briskly, that crisp, important, decided briskness which the tor-

pid intelligence is beginning to recognise in so many of its acquaintances, "for if I had not met you here, I do not know when it would have come about. I see nothing of my friends. I belong to the public-hospital meetings, board meetings, committee meetings, secretary of this, chairman of that. To be sure, I have my day, but there are always crowds of people I care nothing for, whom I must be civil to on account of my charities. Can't you come in some time immediately after breakfast (I take it in my room)? I'd like to see you so much, and Jane,—by the way, what *has* become of Jane? Why, there is Mrs. W——"

Janet's mamma had no opportunity to reply to this somewhat belittling question. Without waiting for an answer, her interlocutress—(yes, there is such a word, I have with my own eyes read it in the immaculate pages of the *North American Review*, in the columns of Henry James)—her interlocutress turned her broad back upon her and trotted off to catch a form of similar dimensions, which was evidently under like pressure of affairs. Though I was carrying half a dozen bundles I felt singularly "empty-handed," as the poet hath it, and was only restored to my accustomed self-complacency by recalling the intellectual deficiencies of my sometime fellow pupil, and reflecting that the mind that for ten years refused to accept the proposition that three times twelve is thirty-six, could not have acquired

superiority over one that cheerfully admitted the justice of eight nines in seventy-two.

And still, simple souls! we did not suspect that this profession of occupations in so violent a form was but a wave of fashion—was but a cult of the hour. We did not suspect it when the lady who writes for the *Lady's H— J—* came in at twilight, very tired and dressed—after the manner of Mrs. E— S— P— D—'s heroines—in a flowing white robe, with soft laces at the throat and a rose of “compelling” perfume in her hair—the dress, in fact, that in our plain way we would call a “Mother Hubbard.” She stole in, almost spirit-wise, and glided to the low stool in front of the fire. “So restful,” she murmured, in that low voice that men are always praising, but when used by their own womenkind, profess not to be able to hear, “this little green spot in the midst of the dusty, hurried way!” (“No, John, listen for yourself; I will not tell you what she says.”) “My life is so-so-so *full!* so-so strenuous! There are so many voices calling out to me for help—voices in the darkness—drowning people who clutch at my hands.” (“Nonsense, John, she doesn't mean what she says. Really, no use to run for your life-preserver.”) “And I am so tired, so tired of people, so tired of thoughts! Oh, I envy you, your peace, your calm! My life is a turgid stream.”

Again the critical person may perceive in these

reproductions a touch of acerbity. It arises from the fact that each of the reporter's acquaintances, while insisting upon her own laborious occupations—the incessant demands made upon her, socially, benevolently, intellectually, united in ignoring our importance, and congratulated us upon the absence of these absorbing interests. Of course, I suppose a high-minded person would not mind; but for Jane and me, frankly, it is not pleasant to be referred to by our intellectual inferiors as sitting in an empty drawing-room, with folded hands, and minds bare as trees in late December.

When Lucy, you remember, in that pious and engaging classic, "The Fairchild Family," was lamenting that her dress was not fresh for the party, Lady Augusta gave her this sound advice: "Go, dear Lucy, and stand behind your mamma, and be assured that nobody will notice you or your dress;" a counsel that, fraught as it was with good sense, did not carry with it that consolation that was to be expected from so admirable a remedy. Were we, indeed, then, drones in the hive, especially Jane, the continuance of whose very existence had been doubted by a former friend?

In one of those moments of self-abasement that come to the proudest spirits, we *did* think that we had nothing to do, that we were bidden nowhere, even that we were left behind in the procession. But gradually the mist cleared away. We saw things

as they were, we recognised the cult. The school friend really managed no more charities than Jane, who was supposed to have gone where charities have their final reward. The Helper of her drowning sex had her monthly stunt to do, and nothing more, and indeed was willing to add to her cares—for the usual honorarium. The little lady across the way still sat in the window and looked out aimlessly into the dull street, and the middle-aged lawyer could not have said the word that meant wedding clothes. The bustling young matron attended to her domestic duties, as she had always done, and had as little idea as ever of plunging into teas and balls. Even our new clergyman who frowned and said: "I can give you five minutes, pray be explicit," was discovered to sit in his study, uninterrupted, three mornings in the week, writing a sermon about Sin and George Eliot, sin being compared to leprosy, in the old fashion, and George Eliot presented for her literary flavour, and the modern appeal to the novel. All this crowding of affairs, this pressure, this "fulness" was indeed a cult, and Jane and I were not without the pale, but simply ignorant of the style.

XXVI

Nervous Prostration

A FRIEND tells me that one of her most cherished intimates has suddenly assumed toward her an attitude of distant reserve and standoffishness. Yesterday they were like the twin swans in Spenser's "Epithalamion"; to-day—oceans divide them. And this, through no sudden access of fortune on the side of the offended one; she has neither discovered an ancestor nor inherited a million; but she is superior, she is cold, she has changed. What has come between them and the "warm, glad handclasp"?

Well, she who attempts to solve the mystery of the female mind invites the daws, but Jane and I were generous with the results of our experience. When a lady suddenly adopts a threatening mien, is distant, reserved, investigation is pretty sure to discover that one of her children has a contagious disease.

There is nothing like a case of scarlet fever to make a mother conceited. Measles have an inflating tendency; and German measles, which are not of

themselves malevolent, but are capable of giving diseases, bring with them the moral and intellectual aggrandisement of the authorship of a new novel, or the discovery of some new condiment to serve with grape fruit.

To illustrate: The other day we were called to the telephone by a friend whose habitual attitude of deference has been one of our reasons for remaining in this street rather than remove to a more fashionable quarter. But instead of the flattering, even deprecatory: "So sorry to disturb you," we were met with a peremptory: "I am quite too occupied to keep my engagement to pour at your tea, and you'd better get someone else."

This from our vine-like friend, to whom I had been a brick wall and she the trellis! Had young D——, whose attentions to her Maria Jane and I had scrutinised with interested but sceptical eyes, had young D—— come up to the cold steel?

That voice, emancipated, self-contained, superior, betrayed a mysterious change in her position.

We suffered a moment of anxiety.

"Jane," said the author severely, "did you tell what I told you?"

Then all was revealed. "Little Martha had a rash," came booming through the tube. "The doctor can't decide what it is, but he thinks measles. She has had measles, but *some* children with very sensitive organisations," and here even the cold

medium of the telephone "pulsed" as we say, with a tide of maternal pride, "some children have them twice."

Of course it is painful to have to wait for a disease to run its course, to regain one's friend; but this is a part of life. When little Martha recovers we shall have her back, like Douglas in the poem, in the old likeness that we knew.

But if a child's passing ailment inflates the parent, how much more a matter of exultation when one is one's self attacked.

As it has been my fortune in life to talk to a great many ladies, I have never regretted that when Pandora opened the box she let out diseases. They have furnished me topics of conversation in places where the springs of language ran low, and so thoroughly do I believe in the magic quality of the simple word "peritonitis," that I would stake my all on the experiment that, did I enter a room in which a dozen deaf and dumb females were seated, and utter that inspiring substantive, a flood of speech would rush to their lips, and, with simultaneous action, the dumb would break the chords and pour forth their experience.

She was a pale lady, of a colourless type, and, in return for the hospitality of a week, my hostess in the country evidently thought it my duty to entertain her all through one breathless summer's afternoon. But she had no children, she was fixed in her

religious belief: of what should we talk, what had we in common to stir the sluggish depths? Something within me (it was a malarial district) whispered: "Try chills." You have doubtless seen a muddy pond under a grey sky, and then beheld it, rosy and dimpled, flushing under the rays of the western sun. "Yes," she responded with liveliness, she had had them for three months and then succumbed to typhoid fever.

There she sat before my face and eyes—no apparition, but flesh and, well, good chalk and water. But when I heard that faithful account of her typhoid fever spell, I could not make myself believe that she had recovered. Three doctors had given her up, she was in a stupor, then delirium, then a stupor again.

And with a relentlessness that would have made her fortune, had she been the author of "The Kentons," she forced me to drink every bitter draught, to swallow every powder; and, by an unsurpassed cruelty of fate, she did not dwell in the land of the capsules. And when she finally consented to open her eyes, to take notice, to go so far as to sit up, what do you think she did? She had a relapse, that is what she did, and I had to do it all over again, drop by drop, powder by powder—to the bitter dregs.

Had she simply gone to Europe the summer before, or read Huysmans, we should have stood

silently facing each other, like the two sphinxes at the entrance of the Temple of Rameses at Luxor; but typhoid fever was like sun on ice, and our spirits rushed together at the taking of the drops.

And disease has a humanising influence. I recollect, on one occasion, being in Cambridge, after having suffered from an attack of rheumatism. The conductors in this city of the intellectually *élite* are not, as a rule, civil, and know no greater joy than to ignore the waving parasol, or the extended arm of the would-be passenger. Hoping to disarm them, I put on a great appearance of hurry and got within a half a square of the corner, Jane running and gesticulating ahead. The conductor was turning his adder's ear, when suddenly, responding to a whisper of her guardian angel she screamed: "Wait a minute, she's got the rheumatism," and her finger indicated a panting figure in the rear.

It is said that years after the disaster of the Pass of Thermopylæ, the Spartan, at mention of that name, ceased his task, his game, his song.

Such was the effect of the word "rheumatism" on that carload of people going to Boston, on errands of life—of death—it may be of shopping. "Got rheumatism, has she?" The motorman came to a full stop. "Ever tried snake oil? They tell me——" "Not so," interrupted the conductor, eagerly running down the steps and offering a filial arm. "You drink thirty glasses of water a day;

water's cheap," which implied reflection upon our travelling costumes, I saw, wounded Jane, who looked abashed. "Madam," said a respectable-looking man in a white waistcoat, "you ought to wear an electric ring. I suffered with your complaint, and I bought one and wore it, and didn't mind being laughed at," and he held up a fat finger, and scowled at the grave and interested passengers. "You would better think you are well, and you would be well."

That "would better" placed her—the sweet-faced, you-are-all-my-very-own-brothers-and-sisters person in neat grey. Until she had found the truth, she had taught—grammar grade No. 4. Now she "just lived, and helped other people to live." She waved a black bag at me, and made a seat for me at her side.

"It don't kill, that's the worst of it. Mother-in-law's had it for twenty-five years." The lean countryman was rewarded with subdued, but sincere expressions of applause, such as was proper in the face of calamity.

But the point is, I got on a Cambridge street car, having delayed it five minutes, and was received with the respect accorded the Irish members of Parliament when they were expelled from that body.

But there is one matter about which I must be plain with you. It is not necessary to have suffered in one's own person. Frequently the chalice is

dashed from our lips when we are about to claim the attention of an audience on account of a surgical operation. Another woman, before we have more than framed our first sentence, snatches the morsel from our lips, seizes the narrative, and leaves us gaping and bewildered. And this not to show her own scars, but to descant upon what an aunt or a supposititious cousin has gone through.

I tell you this because I have myself, and so has Jane, known ladies, inspired by the motive which made Herostratus burn down the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, submit to the knife at the hands of ambitious young surgeons. Now this trial is not at all necessary to give you coveted distinction. No matter how baffling your complaint, how dangerous your operation, it is not you who will get the ear of an assembly of your sex, but the other lady, whose relation, not herself, has been dissected; and lacking a relation, she will contribute something she has culled from a medical journal. Far be it from me in general to urge such advice, but for these occasions, refrain from being yourself, be the other lady.

But conceited as are people who have lost their vermiform appendices, sensitive as she who affects hysteria, as demanding as she who "must breathe" (which request at first sight does not condemn her as exacting, but really means that she requires "ozone," a substance not always on tap), as troublesome as are people with dyspepsia, who look

offended if you invite them to eat potatoes and—to a proffer of coffee say “I? Coffee?” as if a person of intelligence should know by intuition what they can or cannot assimilate—as helpless as one deprived of “the headache,” that armour of the weak, that mantle of the incompetent, all these ailments are as moonlight is to sunlight and as water is to wine, compared to that mysterious and exclusive ailment to which I dare not give a title.

For the caretakers of those so afflicted always keep the name of their malady from them, assuring them that they have pneumonia or smallpox, or some illness which will not inflame their vanity, and make them troublesome and exacting patients.

And those who really have, or worse, affect this disease, are so delighted to see themselves in print, that their families, having read and extracted all the virtue from it, as men do from the morning paper, are more than likely to throw this book in the fire, where it will meet with the fate of Hans Andersen’s “Little Tin Soldier.”

However, in the hope of possessing the qualities of a salamander, I take the liberty of offering to all those who have the somewhat costly honour of entertaining a case of nervous prostration, my respectful condolences. It would be apologies, but that, as the Irishman said of a certain sustaining fluid, any disease is better than no disease, and I am sure that, to the world at large, to which it is a mystery, like

the veiled statue of Isis at Thebes, no more enthralling topic can be suggested.

For myself, I believe that nervous prostration is a new malady. Of course we are all acquainted with "nerves." Until the last twenty years no self-respecting female was without them. In Jane's and my time, they were not as bad as Mrs. Radcliffe depicted them, and those fainting fits that even sensible Miss Ferrier laid on the sloping shoulders of heroines were reserved for the aristocracy. But not even Scott would have sent one of his damsels out into the world with a wardrobe so poor as one in which this truly feminine characteristic was not among the pale blue silks, the silver lace, and the jeweled *aiguillettes*.

But nervous prostration is a totally different thing, and to show myself the reader's real friend, I will say: If you do not want your young woman who is threatened with it, to learn all about it, I advise you to remark in her presence that you have just posted this book to your Aunt Matilda who lives in the country.

Nervous prostration is the disease, primarily, of the rich. So well is this known, that when my poor friend was taken down with it, her doctor—a man of little finesse but a good deal of sincerity—said: "But for certain circumstances, I should diagnose this as nervous prostration"; "certain circumstances" meaning her circumstances. And it also

pertains to those of high-strung mental and physical fibre. One seldom sees it in the South, because the first condition of its existence is lacking, and one also seldom sees it here, as we are known to be both inert and phlegmatic.

It has, therefore, none of the disgraceful qualities of a bad cold, of mumps, or of a fever—which even people in Georgia can have; but it is something to be proud of, glad of, like the wound of a soldier in battle.

A person who was so rich that imagination failed her to think of anything to do, showed, in our opinion, no mean talent when she invented this disease to puzzle the medical fraternity. We spoke of the inflating effect of measles, but do you know a parent who could restrain a throb of maternal pride, could she but mention that the thing she brought into the world had this exclusive disease, confined to millionaires and physical and intellectual athletes?

It is life over again. My neighbour goes to Paris and buys the most exclusive costumes—made for her in all the sacredness of the designer's closet, and a week after her return, all the women of her acquaintance have copied and improved upon them. If nervous prostration could only be confined to those who are worthy to have it, Lady Cræsus and geniuses, I think that even their nearest connection would be willing to be martyred for the glory of it.

But the disease has spread. I know of a newspaper correspondent who had set up signs of it till called down by her exacting superior, and I know also persons whose sole accomplishment (and, it must be admitted, sole employment) is "pouring" at afternoon teas, who have shown symptoms of it that only a sceptic would mistake. But the most interesting case I have seen recently is that of a lady on whom I went to call, who appeared in fashionable attire, it is true, but accompanied by a trained nurse, who sat behind her and made motions to indicate when the subjects I started were inimical to this peculiar disease. The mortal form of the invalid was so sensitive to maleficent influences that when I, being an old friend, took the liberty of raising a window, there was a commotion approaching that of the inhabitants of Kimberley when General French raised the siege. I spoke humbly of the deleterious influences of a draught to cover my confusion, and the nurse again made signs, and later I found that the latest treatment is to suggest no malign or painful influences.

Thinking to give a cheerful bit of news, I mentioned the departure to a better world of old Mr. —, who passed the last fifty years of his life in a rolling chair, and the last twenty (he was a Georgian, and one returns to one's first love) mistaking his valet's head for a watermelon, and trying to carve it; but at this effort the nurse waved

both hands and a fan, and spirited the patient out of the room, who disappeared weeping, leaving me with the feeling of having wantonly broken a superior Sèvres vase. My friend evidently took that solemn and personal view of the subject that was characteristic of a young preacher, from whom I had the happiness of receiving the following bit of news: "Socrates is dead. Plato is dead, and, my brethren, I, too, shall die." But I think it may be admitted that a trained nurse is as difficult a person to please as Louis the Eleventh, who burned at the stake all the artists who dared to caricature him, and, with equal impartiality, all the artists who tried to reprove those who had laughed at him.

The spectacle of the blue-robed, stiffly starched female with the "Oh, yes, dear," and "Perhaps-after-we-have-rested-a-bit,-dear," air, superintending the conversation like a vigilant Sunday-school teacher at a picnic, has, if the truth be told, turned the ambition of Jane and myself in adverse direction, and we have almost made up our minds to publish a series of papers on "What Our Novelists Can Eat," by way of exciting some interest in ourselves, though I am told we can do so by having appendicitis, which is open to all classes, but still retains its place like Lear, Hamlet, and Othello.

Still, it must be admitted, there is no disease so fraught with a charm all its own as nervous prostration.

For instance; I have a friend (I hope you will not think me arrogant when I add, an intimate friend) whose unique affection is that she cannot put on her own gloves, though what she can do with anybody's else, I have not found out. But this incapacity has been related to me as a sort of badge of honour, like the medals at Sebastopol. And I have another friend, who, through choice, has sequestered herself in a dark room, with a trained nurse as her sole society. Of this last-named acquaintance I speak with the respect the Hindoos give those who have been afflicted by Siva and lost their wits. No sane person, whatever her disease, ever shut herself up for two months with a trained nurse for company.

It is hard, after these experiences, to get the most affectionate audience to listen to me when I would proffer fitting words with which to address the victim of nervous prostration. I am not myself clear about my own feelings concerning it. Do I, like the persons in Mr. Aldrich's poem, love it with a deathless hate, or hate it with a deathless love? Nevertheless, whatever my words, like the goods of the Spanish shopkeepers, they are yours.

I am pretty sure that the following is a safe remark. "You must not make any effort, all you can do is to be fair to yourself." And to this, on my own responsibility, I will add: "You are now suffering from the strain you have been under, and must vacate your own mind, as you would quit an empty

room." One hesitates to praise one's self, but it really seems to me that these speeches are as perfect as an egg, or the sonnet; and what the strain may have been, or whether one in full possession of her faculties would like to have her mind compared to an empty room, is no delicately minded person's business.

As I write this sentence, which might be construed as uncomplimentary of the class I most reverence and respect, a silent, but critical relation, who, like the South American lizard, is a success as an ornament, but not as a conversationalist, turns toward me her handsome, but rebuking eyes. If they were speaking eyes they would say: "You, of all people, to scoff! You who go to bed simply to luxuriate in the society of those starchy angels, and who pity, of all the tired souls in the world, those distracted ones who suffer from the heartbreaking 'I do not know what it is that ails me.'"

But there is a road to light, even for these. It is the road taken by him whose life is told in the two red volumes that lie on the table. From his early boyhood till after that last hard fight in Samoa, Robert Louis Stevenson struggled with the elements that form the malady I have made a poor jest of—the bitterest, the most wearisome of all sicknesses. But for gaiety, for courage, for determination not to die—well, are they not written in these letters? You have but to read them to know his secret.

"There seemed to be," says Mr. Colvin, his editor, "more of vitality and fire of the spirit in him, as he lay exhausted and speechless in bed, than in an ordinary roomful of people."

"We did nothing for him," in Mr. Birrell's happy words; "it was our doleful plight he sought to solace."

And I do not recommend it, because I do not want to bring you sorrow, but for the cheerfulest, the most comforting words, and at the same time words that break the heart, read his letter to James Payn, when Payn's last illness was upon him, and Stevenson knew that he himself "could not hold out long."

This "Life and Letters" of Stevenson is the best tonic for nervous prostration. It costs two dollars, but then the starchy angel will cost her society and twenty-five dollars a week.

XXVII

Pervading Personalities

I HAVE been watching the funeral of the little lady across the street. Such an orderly funeral! The children had their hair tied very tight in small, thin pigtails, and carried their handkerchiefs neatly folded in their black-gloved hands. The husband, poor man, stepped upon the sidewalk, but before he entered the house, though but lightly his shoes had touched the pavement, he carefully scraped his feet, and then rubbed them on the doormat. Did I, or did I not see him glance furtively up toward the second-story front window, where one was wont to watch him? "She is not there to see or reprimand you," I came near calling out. But her spirit lingered, her pervading personality. That man will scrape his feet on the marble steps of the celestial city, does he live to get there.

She was a small, spare little lady, with smooth flaxen hair, and for fifteen years she had held her calm despotic sway over that household. Gentle, lady-like, obstinate, she had managed to get her own way—the commonplace, usual way, to which the

whole world gave in. Jane and I used to watch her set out for church Sunday mornings, cool, amiable, self-possessed, her prayer-book opened with a sprig of geranium, her little vinaigrette in her left hand, her smooth, fair locks held in place with invisible hairpins. Her husband was a robust, red-cheeked creature, whose natural gait was between a run and a stumble. Every Sunday he slammed the front door, and every Sunday she sent him back to close it properly. At least such was the impression of neighbours, who were watching them behind closed blinds. It was reported to these neighbours that no member of her family ever succeeded in resisting the elegant composure of her opposition. Every morning she set a glass of flowers upon the writing table of her husband's father. He was a kind soul, but he did not like this particular attention. So every day he threw away water and flowers, and one day he threw away the vase. But the morning succeeding this desperate act did not set him free. There was a twin of the discarded vase filled with water and flowers on his table. After that he gave up.

Nobody, so we were informed, in that house, liked oatmeal; but for fifteen years they sat down to oatmeal with regularity.

It was told of one of her Sunday-school scholars, that one day he defied her. It seems that after hearing her especially naturalistic account of the episode

of Jonah and the whale, he emitted a small, shrill whistle. This sort of thing has happened to me, and it was with interest that I awaited a record of her conduct upon this occasion; but what she did by way of chastisement does not seem so dreadful, written down here. It was the use of a single phrase: "Pray, don't be vulgar," but, as uttered, it brought the scoffer to tears of impotent rage.

When she died, it was of a singular affection. She asked for the moon, and her husband was in such perfect training that he got it for her, and she lost her mind because she could not make it get up and go down at the same time every night and every morning.

'And her friend's perfect security that she had gone to a better place—the best place, as they were orthodox—was founded on the fact that she required everybody to be at her family prayers, and had neat hair. One thing, however, is certain: she has left a void over the way where I see her stout spouse walking up and down in restless grief, stooping now and again to pick up a thread from the carpet.

"Even in death," says Flaubert of the terrible Madame Bovary, "even in death she corrupted him."

'And apropos of this experience, somebody came in the other day and placed a sprig of jessamine on my desk. For a little while it lay there in its bronze-

green leaves, the pale yellow blossoms with pear-shaped corolla exuding the faint, exquisite perfume. A little while and the flower opened, the faint odour had grown an overpowering one, filling nose, mouth, and lungs, and it became an imminent question which should quit the place, the flower or I, for there was no room for both. And while I was meditating upon seizing the spray and throwing it out of the window, what you would probably call my morbid sensibilities forbade. In destroying the jessamine, I would have gratified, in an occult way Mr. Lafcadio Hearn would understand, a long cherished wish in regard to one whom it greatly resembled.

That flower brought back a lady, beautiful, romantic, young, with whom we passed a month last summer at a mountain resort. She came into our plain little company of short skirts and shirt waists, our bare heads and sunburned faces, like a princess among churls—glowing, radiant, with shining hair and luxuriant bloom, with ribbons, laces, and soft flowing garments. And though she took a humble place in our spare little dining-room, like Montrose disguised as Lord Kilpont's groom when he sat below the salt, where she sat was the head of the table.

This was one's impression when we first saw her enter the room, with only the flame of a smoky kerosene lamp to light her splendours. But the next day the atmosphere of the place was completely changed from one of easy negligence to one of

troublesome ambitions. The shirt waists underwent a critical examination; people bewailed and berated themselves that they had not put in "just one evening gown"; the rare, spoiled men of the party, who, up to this time, would not permit their humble admirers to sniff the odours of tobacco from pipes smoked in the room with them, but huddled together under a tree, appeared next night in careful, if unsuccessful, toilets, and lingered about the door for what they did not themselves confess.

A week had not passed, but we found the presence of the beautiful but stimulating guest fatiguing. We could not get away from her. She pervaded the place, the air, the piazzas, with her little shawls, her French novels, the glimmer of her Navajo blanket under the trees. There was nothing offensive in her attitude, but it was dominant; and, do what we would, she projected herself into our lives.

Jane, who has not, in general, the slightest curiosity about how people sleep, or whether their food assimilates properly, Jane was heard eagerly asking if "Mrs. ——'s bed was comfortable," and experienced anxiety lest the flapjacks prove indigestible. The fact was, that woman put us all on tiptoe, in which strained attitude (which was like nothing so much as the preparation for the Exodus, when people ate with staves in their hands) we took our meals, while all other topics of gossip, except her doings, died on the porch.

The perfume of jessamine indeed had become too heavy to be supported in air that we constantly breathed. And so plainly was this opinion written upon our countenances that an acquaintance, to whom I permitted freedom of speech in return for buckboard rides, said to me: "Why are you so jealous of Mrs. ——? She doesn't encroach on your ground, that I see."

To which question I replied: "No, I am not jealous. I simply do not want to be in the house with anyone who occupies my attention to a paramount degree. I do not like to stretch my neck, even to look at a queen; I do not like to have to live up to people, or consider them. When I was young I had to go to a certain watering place every summer where some people named Falconer-Bridges went. The place exuded Falconer-Bridges. When I was older I was made to go to a hotel where my reception depended upon the landlady's state of mind; she was a pervading personality, and we passed our days wondering who was her favourite, and whom she disliked; though, to be fair, she disliked almost everybody, except some servile spirits who went to what I call night school, to her daughter—a lady who wished to go to college some day, and was making money by lecturing, hot summer evenings, on the American poets. With all these experiences back of me, that dominant note, however sweet, has a discordant sound. Hence, my dear," and here

Janet's mamma looked affectionately upon the one to whom she had taken the trouble to explain herself, "hence, I prefer a comfortable common-placeness."

I was relating this experience to a friend, the one in whom I have the most implicit confidence, and wondering if I was narrow-minded to object to the overpowering jessamine, when she told me that she met me with comprehension—that she too had once passed a month in a country place of similar character with two interesting persons whom she called "the Simpsons." They were very civil, very intelligent, and both possessed pervading personalities. My friend, who had adopted for both mind and body a summer costume of black alpaca and straw hat, trimmed with mull, was without ambition, and played best with her kind. The Simpsons, however, soon entered her life, and possessed themselves of it in a manner most repugnant to herself. They had the toothache, and people went around with little flannel bags filled with pepper and disputed hotly whether the sufferers should hold whiskey in their mouths or swallow it, though Mr. Simpson was all for the latter method. Once well out of this malady, Mr. Simpson promptly sprained his ankle, and she, a poet, lost her manuscript in the woods. In presence of these calamities, my friend had an attack of peritonitis, from which she recovered without aid, her disease being of too in-

significant a nature to mention even to her doctor. In fact, at its worst, she confesses to have crawled up a steep incline on her knees, imagining that she saw at its summit a bit of white paper fluttering among the leaves—the missing lyrics.

I do not think that the Simpsons prided themselves upon their personality or intruded it upon others. It was, in fact, a misfortune, like that of the mortal to whom the goddess of Dawn persuaded Jupiter to grant immortality, forgetting to ask that youth be joined with the gift. For my friend's interest in them was eternal, but her dislike grew till she quitted the spot which sheltered them and her. Would she, but for respect for the law, have thrown them out of the window (you see I perserve my metaphor of the jessamine)? She tells me that she could no more have lived with them than have lived with Wagner's music or as the wife of Socrates.

Now a simple person would not suppose that a piece of furniture could be endowed with a personality, but it can. One day we got a notice informing us that the custom house held for us a package of great value, sent by a relation whom we had long loved by reputation, but never seen; a relation, in fact, for whom we cherish that spontaneous affection that it is natural to accord the wealthy and the childless.

With trembling fingers and palpitating hearts the entire family united in opening the case which con-

tained the present, and when it appeared from beneath the mass of scented paper and straw, what was our delight when the throne of a Begum lay exposed to view. It was made of carved teakwood, the ivory head of Vishnu, with amethysts for eyes, looking down from the arch of the back, while Idra and Agni stared at us with obtruding orbs of jade in the curved arms.

I suppose there is no one, however bold, who would consent to look in the mouth the gift of a childless uncle. This had awe-inspiring teeth and a red throat, and we put it with awe in the midst of our own Michigan machine-made furniture, and Jane, to show a pleasing familiarity with thrones, hung a pink silk tidy over its left arm.

The arrival of our throne caused a great excitement in our neighbourhood, and people flocked to see us—ostensibly—but really to see it. It was so large that our tables and chairs, of somewhat fragile make, had the look of having been made for dwarfs or Lilliputians. The chromos “Alone at Last,” and “Easter Eggs,” on which we had expected to feast our eyes for coming generations, were raw and modern in the presence of those staring orbs, that mystic countenance. To make room for it we had to banish our tea table and the Dresden china cups and saucers with the rosebuds on the rim, the gilt sofa, upon which John culled wisdom from the pages of Symonds’ “Renaissance in Italy,” with his

eyes shut. To live up to that throne, in fine, deprived us of every earthly comfort and most of our friends. We became suspicious when they called, charging them with coming to see it, not us. It belittled the rest of our possessions, and, though it made them cheap, was in itself no solace for their loss. Its pervading personality caused it to assume the aspect of the Juggernaut, and it crushed us with its wheels. Having placed it in my own mind with the Beautiful Guest who was the serpent in the Adirondack paradise and the Simpsons who spoiled my poor friend's summer, I took matters in my own hands, and, having picked out its baneful eyes, I sold my throne to a traveling show.

But I could not pick out Elvira's eyes, nor could I have sold her. It takes two to make a bargain.

The other night Jane and I went to a dinner, and when we got home, I heard her call in a loud, imperious voice, "Oh, Ma' Ann! oh, Ma' Ann! come here directly. Bring my very oldest slippers, the ones with holes in them that I was going to give to the poor, and then go to the pantry and bring me *anything* you can find to eat." These remarks were addressed to a coloured person whose intellect is not wholly developed, and who is still under the impression that she belongs to Jane, who, for reasons of her own, has not mentioned to her the change in her situation that came about in 1865.

One of the advantages of living with a person

all your life is that, when she conducts herself out of the ordinary, you do not have to ask why. I perfectly understood Jane's necessity for physical relaxation after mental strain, and, though I had no one who had been free for more than forty years, but who still considered herself in bondage, to assist me, I, too, began at once to divest myself of cordage.

And then we both sat before the study fire and talked about the guest of the evening, Elvira Manton. "Opportunities to congratulate myself upon my insignificance have not been few, you know," said Jane, "and our hostess did not deviate this evening from her rule of putting me behind a large *épergne*, where I could escape notice. I suppose at least that she intended me to escape notice, but she did not know Elvira. From mere exuberance and flow of wit Elvira turned her siphon on me. I was just about to put a bit of roast duckling, stuffed with olives, to my lips, when she directed her aim at me. The man behind my chair, of course, saw his opportunity, and seized my plate. I looked up at Elvira, as I felt bound to do, smiled, looked down for my plate. It was gone.

"Old Mr. Swain, who always takes me in to dinner, then knew that he was in harm's way, and preparing himself for her next onslaught, caught his plate in both hands and, half rising, stood open-mouthed to receive the dart. He looked very plain. But he didn't care for that. He cared for his duck-

ling. Sure enough, in a moment he was struck in the face. Elvira's javelin this time was sheathed in French, a language which I myself prefer to have addressed to me slowly, that I may collect my irregular verbs. But old Mr. Swain, no doubt, felt that time would not be of material aid to him, so he sputtered, "Very good, 'pon my word, very good," and when the liveried minion sprang for the plate, he turned upon him such a look of frozen indignation that the creature started back, like Fear, in Campbell's poem. 'That woman,' said old Mr. Swain, turning toward Elvira his little green eyes, 'that woman gives me a pain in the small of my neck,' and he tried to show me the affected spot with his heavy finger. But not believing in the existence of the small of any portion of his ponderous person, I refused to look at it.

"I am sure I do not want to hurt your feelings," continued Jane, "but you have no idea how you all looked while Elvira mesmerised you. There she sat, all black jet and white satin, with an aigrette in her hair, nodding, jingling, scintillating, looking up and down the table, subduing you with her glance, like the lion-tamer at the circus. Belinda faded away like a wraith before her eyes, and you, at the first reference to a witticism that passed between the Duc de Rochefoucauld and Mlle. de Bourbon, you started an understanding smile. But before your first had died on your lips, Elvira had set another bon-mot

going, so that your features were like stiffening clay—indeed, if you had been perfectly beautiful, I would compare you to the Medusa in the Uffizi—the moment, you know, when she finds her hair is made of snakes.”

And for a fact, but for the last remark of dubious compliment, what Jane said was true.

We had met—a party of congenial people, who spoke the same language and came from the same country—who, when I alluded to the “Cogswell affair,” knew what I meant, and were equally at home when someone spoke of “The Runaway.” We were of the usual age, too,—well! we had not definitely admitted anything, but we ladies with décolleté gowns wore high collars of pearl or other obtainable jewels.

Into these calm waters Elvira sailed her yacht, all the steam on; and, as a person who knows better can say *anything*, acted as a hand grenade and put out all our fires.

You heard Jane call for food, but if after this bountiful repast Jane was hungry, fancy the depleted condition of people at whom Elvira had aimed before they had tasted their soup?

It was a pitiful spectacle—that of old General Stacy, for whom Jane and I always vote for Congress, with the red-pepper cruet in his hand, and the consommé smiling under his eyes, while Elvira pelted him with epigrams culled from St. Simon.

Before he could collect himself the minions had got off the second course—something hot and delicious, with curry in it; and the first thing he could get his hand on was an ice. He looked, and so did the rest of us, after an hour of the enchaining Elvira, like codfish—those you see on the wharfs in New England fishing towns, cold, and filled with congealed blood. She had another queer effect which I recognised in a dim fashion, as having felt before; I put it down to the period when I was in a lower form of existence—say a frog or a rabbit, and the subject of fascination by snakes and other reptiles, but could not place the time or æon, when I was assisted by a woman who sat next me after we left the dining-room—a dull, bovine creature, but with a sort of instinct which amply supplies the place of mind.

“I felt all during the dinner as if I were back at Miss Jackson’s boarding school. Elvira has the same way of looking at everyone at once when she speaks, and I was afraid that if I took my eyes from her face, she would call out: ‘Lack of attention, Miss Dillard, ten demerits and no dessert.’ You remember, don’t you?”

Indeed I did remember. The creature, in her ambling way, had struck the note. Elvira, the brilliant, produced the effect of which our boarding-school mistress was past-master, and with that “No dessert,” inflicted the same sort of punishment. I hope this most deserving class will not take offence

at this confession, but the fact is that, when I go to a dinner party, I do not care to fancy myself back again under Miss Jackson's unflinching eye.

Thinking it over, before the fire, Jane and I have decided that people with strong personalities ought not to go out. Their minds are a kingdom to them, as they will modestly tell you, and in our opinion they should stay on their own property.

XXVIII

The New Etiquette

MAMMA," said Janet, in her clear and resonant voice, which holds as much of mystery and as much of coquetry as a marble paper-weight, "I wish you wouldn't call people 'ladies' and 'gentlemen.' It not only sounds as if you came out of the ark, but I think it immoral. To profane the noble name of woman by giving her a title which conveys the idea of helplessness and incapacity, and to call a man by a word that conveys the idea of caste, is to rob them of their highest title of respect. And I wish you wouldn't say 'ma'am.' Nobody but servants say 'ma'am'! Well, I believe courtiers *do* so address the Queen, and maybe one may say it to one's grandmother, but really in this country, it isn't done. And won't you and Aunt Jane please not rise and shake hands when men come into the room? It's such wretched form, and mortifies me so."

During Janet's appeal to my conscience to abolish the ignoble words "lady" and "gentleman," Jane and I exchanged glances. By what possible con-

trariety of circumstances, had this barndoor fowl been hatched in a nest of linnets like mother and aunt? For what slip in a previous state of existence was I now suffering the humiliation of a child who talks like a Boston public-school graduate, has fed on Mrs. Whitney for a spiritual pabulum, and spent a year, as an object lesson to aspiring poverty, in a college settlement?

These unanswerable questions presented themselves to my mind (I believe I told you that Jane and I have quick intelligences), while I was being lectured on my abuse of titles; but I rallied, and had pleasure in recognising the influence of heredity when the child appealed to my regard to "good form." Therefore to this counsel,—delivered without excitement, but with that calm air of conviction that always has the paralysing effect upon Jane and me of making us pause and think,—I really had no reply ready. I have always wanted to be like other people, and disliked and feared the disapprobation of the veiled divinity known as "They say." Perhaps I should have talked the matter over with her, but Janet always has a pressing engagement, when I want to discuss things, to teach some stranger how "to sweep a room, as for thy laws," or some inland person to spell such words as "yacht" or "tarpaulin," so it is hard to get her attention. Besides she does not like explanations, and when she does listen, they must be very clear, with-

out the entangling mysteries of humour, for which she has a dislike, and, I think, a little fear, scenting ridicule. People have no right to bore others by talking about their children, but I will say this. To know our dear girl is to know her mind, which is a shadowless pool, under a cloudless sky, with not a tree within a hundred miles of its borders. The blue of Janet's eye is the blue of a winter's sky, yet devoid of clouds. The blue of the eyes of Jane is the blue the moonlight makes when it falls on a frosty pane, and, if I were a painter like Monet, I should not paint Janet, but Jane.

Now, with all the will in the world to "conform," and to be an obedient parent, for I have always had an ambition not to mortify my own flesh and blood by my manners or my peculiarities, I feel myself cramped by the total exclusion from my conversation of the word "ma'am." It is not possible to use it on my grandmother, whom Janet tells me a younger person might taper off on. Even to please the Impeccable Young Person, I will not upset the timid Jane by evoking the shades of one who cannot answer back. And opportunities of using it upon Alexandra—well, they are not frequent. It has therefore become a question of choice as to whether I am to go into domestic service, where I can have the opportunity of saying it all day long, or whether I will associate wholly with the other sex. But here I find myself in peril somewhat similar. I wonder

if I will make enemies or lose your esteem, if I tell you that where Jane and I were raised, we said "Sir"? I am told that where there is a great deal of form, there is little devotion. Jane and I said "Sir," as an outward mark of respect. Under its cover, we led lives of unbridled liberty and independence.

But as to the other suggestions, I did not see why I was too old to say "woman" and "man," why I could not keep my seat, why I could not fold my hands. Behind my back a friend once said of me that I possessed a "sweet reasonableness," transposing Matthew Arnold to do me honour.

I would begin Sunday afternoon. And it happened that an octogenarian cousin came upon that occasion, to pay his yearly visit. And when I, anxious not to insert notions of the importance of his sex into his head, while I insinuated my own superiority—when I remained like a sitting statue of Siva in the *Salle d'Antiquités d'Assyrie* in the Louvre, he limped about for a chair, and finally, emitting a senile chuckle, said: "So the family rheumatism has overtaken you, I see; with the B——'s after fort——" In an instant, he would have named a year in the presence of one to whom the information would have excelled in melody seraphic strains.

You remember that when, for fun, her two compatriots called out at the dinner table: "Low

bridge!" the American duchess ducked her head. She had been—well, she had been a stewardess on a canal boat. So, when my relation uttered a word, he was not permitted to finish. The new etiquette fell from the writer as a garment, as the shell from the quickened butterfly; those members, the lack of which caused the holocaust of the Spanish queen, were put into accelerated motion. The old gentleman not only was received standing, he was addressed as "Sir," and the idea that I should allude to his wife as a "dear old woman" faded into thin air like the ghost of Hamlet's father when the glow-worm showed the matin to be near.

Never mind. Better luck next time. "Think!" I told my soul, "what a time it took you to learn to say "don't—you," and "at—all"; how long to apply the word "cunning" to the Venus of Milo, "appealing" to the odour of a flower—how you suffered a sort of sea-sickness when you had to choose between "convincing," "pleasing," and "attractive," when you would praise. Remember how you declared that your feelings about "de—ah" resembled those of M. Lacour, when there was talk in the French Academy, of admitting the verb "*baser*." "*Eh bien, messieurs, mais s'il entre je sors*." "But at least you can master the third rule, and not shake hands." The opportunity to take this encouraging advice was close upon me. An embarrassed country youth, but one who, like the

young man in the Bible, had great possessions, called on us the very next day. He had learned his manners from his mamma, who had learned hers at the Female Academy which had turned out the polished Jane and the author. Therefore, meaning no possible disrespect, he held out a limp, perspiring hand in greeting. . . I believe you have had the pleasure of reading, a few pages back, an edifying essay on the advantages of "now," the felicity of the present moment. Should I take my own medicine swallow my own bitter draught? Of course if I refused his hand, I must make it up to him by an engaging and welcoming smile. I must, in a word, like properly brought-up young ladies, say "no," and look "yes"; but is one among you under the impression that the person who is holding out his hand is in any condition to think of anything but what to do with it, if no answering pressure meets it, he knows very little about human feelings. If you have ever tried it, you won't think it an easy thing to get back a hand you have extended, even though it was done by your own volition. For a full minute we looked at each other, and from the expression of agony that distorted the features of that young man, I inferred that to move a limb paralysed from birth would have been play to it. He, in the attitude of a mendicant, I ignoring his petition, and yet uttering complimentary and insincere words of welcome—that's the picture.

If ever, in after life, that young man hears another man spoken of in terms of contempt because "he can't put his hand in his pocket," I am sure that he will be ready to defend him. He will say—"no more difficult task was ever given to mortal man."

And the outcome of this effort to preserve "good form"? Well, these are hard times, to speak plainly, and a country person with a plantation on the Eastern Shore may possess private virtues that offset ignorance of social rules. But though Janet was not cold and Jane was gushing, "the tender grace of a day that is dead" is not more likely to return to our parlour than our schoolfellow's boy. I was going to say "touch of a vanished hand," but I remembered that it was on "hand," we floundered. The hand was all there, but the touch was not.

Now an ignorant person would think that the new etiquette had been pretty well defined by these rules. But they are, after all, only examples of the underlying principle that governs it. The idea is this. The personal note must be eliminated. It is impolite to oppose the will of another. It is polite to take for granted that the acts of our fellow-beings are regulated by calm judgment and high thinking. But we will see more results of these plausible rules, so misleading in their simplicity.

In old times, you remember, when a visitor said

she must go, we used the coaxing formula, "Do stay." If she declined our invitation for a coming function, excusing herself on the score of her delicate health, or "I never go anywhere," we put up the bait in this guise: "Don't you think you can *kind of come?*" If the gentleman in the street-car offered one a seat, we smiled and ventured, "You are very kind," and were there a tempting morsel, and we the host, we were not ashamed to ignore the to-be-expected—"No, thank you, delicious, but——" We slipped it on the guest's plate with a tender glance of understanding.

Now, the new etiquette is a very beautiful, but a very subtle thing. At one time a man stood with his hat off in the elevator, were a woman present. Now it is the height of delicate civility for him to keep it on, that she may understand that he has effaced himself by ignoring her presence. When he gives up his place in the tram, he is performing so splendid an act of self-abnegation that any recognition of his conduct would be displeasing to his high, altruistic spirit. When he makes this sacrifice, he does not do so for the sake of any individual woman, or indeed for womanhood at all, but for his own sake, and for the fulfilment of an ideal. He does it as the Buddhists pray, for the reflex influence. Some refined persons go even further. They say that as it is painful to feel one's self under obligation, he who has abandoned his seat for the pleasure of

another is made uncomfortable, does she acknowledge the kindness.

When the visitor says, "I must go," the truly polite person will do everything to facilitate her desire, run and open the door; even, on occasion, give her a gentle push. The idea is, you see, that every sane person knows her own mind, and if she says a thing, means it.

But it takes elderly people some time to adapt themselves to this somewhat startling admission, and they are constantly complaining of the neglect and lack of cordiality on the part of their friends. It was our province lately to bind up the wounds of an octogenarian who had been violently ejected from the front door of an old but fashionable friend, to whom she had gone with the intention of passing the day. The ejection followed the perfectly understood feint of tying her bonnet strings, on the part of the decayed female. When another survivor of the wreck of the nineteenth century bent his aged back and picked up a young woman's parasol, he was offended because she received it with a stony stare. He did not understand the highest form of politeness. When another, with florid tastes, delayed the gratification of his appetite for curried chicken, as children save the raisins in a cake for the last, and said, "N-o—thank you," he was paralysed with disappointment and baffled desire, when the coveted portion was instantly removed.

But the most melancholy of all lessons, and learned at the knees of a stern teacher, was that acquired by a dear girl, ignorant of current usage. She had been brought up by fossils who told her that it was indelicate to accept an offer of marriage the first time of asking. Men, in the opinion of these left-overs, are impulsive creatures; and a becoming gown, a pose in the moonlight, a toothsome supper, have been responsible for the utterance of compromising words which, later, they have repented of. To have caught him on the fly would—to these kind souls—have looked like taking advantage. So the poor thing, loving dearly, and having the most thrifty desire to be comfortably settled, looked—she assured Jane and me that she only looked—“No,” and waited to be urged. Alas! she was taken at her look. “Her will,” said her stern and upright lover, “is my law. Would you have me doubt her perfect judgment, her utter comprehension of herself?”

Then that personal note, which every well-bred person will avoid striking. To be sure, there are things to be said in favour of shunning it. The sunflower never turned its face to its god with more regularity than the writer of this confession to remarks, for the sake of conversation, addressed to strangers about their own kin-people or their own affairs. I recollect once giving a mother the details of the runaway of her own daughter, with current

gossip on the subject, and once I had the satisfaction of telling an author exactly what I thought of his last book. As I like only one sort of book, the opinion was more disciplinary than flattering to him that heard it. But, as we say when we want to be particularly non-committal, "There is a good deal to be said on both sides" of this question of eliminating personalities. Unfortunately, Janet's mamma committed the new rule to memory just before taking ship from Cherbourg. The weather was rough. Her steamer chair was lashed to that of a stranger whose accent, when she asked for bouillon, was so cosmopolitan that it was impossible to place her. Our proximity (do you recall the situation, your sympathies are at once enlisted), was that to which the intimacy of the Siamese twins was a bowing acquaintance. Not to speak at all would have solved the problem, but, reader, we were women. For seven days were we joined together in indissoluble union, and evidently she had a Janet of her own: for she knew as well as I, I saw by revealing signs, the dictum, "*No questions asked, no unsolicited information given.*" To form an idea of what that voyage was, would be difficult even to you, of trained and brilliant imagination. We assumed certain things—that both could read and write—and, I make no apologies, it leaked out that both had had peritonitis; and we inferred that each had been to Europe, and both were going home. With this

slender furnishing, we passed the interminable hours. People are always pooh-poohing Jane's and my grievances, but I should like a scoffer to tell me how long *she* could keep up a conversation on Henry James' last novels and the tendency of the age to materialism. At any rate, when I descended the gangway at New York, I asked the first man I met what his income was, and the first woman her age, and how much she paid for her long wrap. Such was the effect of the reaction.

The philosopher, seeking for a cause of these changes in social usages, will attribute it to that passion for sincerity which is an obsession of the age. That desire to "get at the heart of things," that profound longing for simplicity and earnestness. To love perfectly is to believe perfectly, and he who would grant the highest happiness is he who would give that other his own will. If, as an illustration, you, at ninety, resign your seat in the street-car to a girl who is half-past nineteen, she should not take away the austerity of your sacrifice by rewarding you even with a smile. You are your own recompense. And again, to suspect you of the insincere and childish device of pretending to want to go, when you are really dying to stay, is to reflect on your adamant character for uprightness. And upon the solemn subject of matrimony—to show a sign of indecision is to be what Janet calls "unworthy."

"A woman," said a New England maiden to

Jane, "should have made up her mind what she is going to do, long before the word is spoken." And though Jane, who has little control over her emotions, gasped, "The indelicate creature, as if anybody ever thought at all until they are obliged to—" the inexorable, speaking conscience went on—"If the answer is to be 'No,' the word should never be spoken. No unmarried woman," continued the perfect flower of womanhood, "should have to blush to say that she has received an offer. That she did receive it and is not married is a proof of her frivolity."

Well, we live in strange, untrodden ways. I would give ten years, well, I would give ten years of John's life to see the outcome of it, but this I know—it is a serious thing to be taken at one's word.

XXIX

Original Sin

WE get attached to that to which we are accustomed. There was the prisoner of the Bastile, you know, who begged to go back, when liberated from the place of his long duration. There was Miss Mitford, whose father was so disagreeable and exacting an old man that his death caused joyful congratulations to pour from the lips of his daughter's friends, but whose departure broke her heart. And it is the same sort of feeling, one of missing and bewilderment, that has sent Jane and me upon an extraordinary errand,—the search for original sin. For we had as well make no bones about it, but tell you simply and without circumlocution that this once useful and universal refuge from responsibility is lost. Some people say it is dead, others go so far as to assert that it never existed; but, whatever the theory, it has disappeared. And with it have gone a great deal of freedom and that calmness which the acceptance of the inevitable brings.

Now, as to original sin, we who believed in it rested upon it as a transparent fact. Let a person be created cross, selfish, quick-tempered, we did not expect the leopard to change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin. Inherited vices, especially if they were of a bold and manly kind, we were pretty apt to preen ourselves on, in fact. People boasted of the "Smith pride," the "Robinson implacability." Those who got into homicidal rages excused themselves with the indisputable announcement, "I was born so." Of course in the Catechism we deplored original sin, but even theologians held on to it with tenacity. To be able to account for a vicious act or a selfish habit by putting the responsibility upon a distant female ancestor was not without its charm. Eve has been properly abused, but I would like to know what we should have done without her? "Eve's daughter," "one of Eve's family,"—you remember the poet Hood uses the expression to extenuate the act of a very beautiful young girl, making it rhyme with "clamily,"—a hint his followers have not failed to crib when the situation demanded it. In fact, simple and unaffected as are the terms, they were worth pages of foolscap for the defence.

Now, a sensible person would have supposed that with a broad breast like that of the universal mother to fall back on, people would have been content. But there have come along such opposite personalities as Froebel and Herbert Spencer who, with their

growing influence and their disposition to aggrandise human nature, have fairly driven our poor refuge out of society. Before the philosophers came, we used the familiar phrase, "Go see what the baby is doing and make him stop." But, with advanced learning, we know that baby came into the world perfectly good and trustworthy, and that the desire to interfere with him, and certainly the necessity for doing so, is not his fault. It is your fault and mine, and though evil is involuntary, it is not native, but acquired and a matter of education. The burden of responsibility, then, falls on his instructors. The dear mother of us all is purged of her responsibility, and her power to transmit evil. But, at what a cost!

It is quite true that since the "myth of the garden," weak-minded mammas have used the expression, when they would defend utterly indefensible offspring, "You stirred him up," or "You irritated him: naturally he is an angel." There is no novelty in this form of expression; but what they meant was, "It is the active old Adam in you, his papa, and the latent old Adam in him, that is to blame."

And, though I am not one to praise indiscriminately, we have all noticed the patience with which the old-fashioned father put up with the extravagances in dress in wife or daughter. That early and instinctive feeling about clothes, which is one of Eve's most interesting characteristics, has had

its softening influence upon generations of male heads of families. They admitted that it was a long-inherited, primeval trait, and they called it original sin.

Can anyone with a head on her shoulders wonder that when there was such a palm tree in the desert, such a rock in the storm to shelter us, we clung to it; that we miss it, and that Jane and I are out this gay spring morning trying to find original sin, and if it is dead, to revivify it?

For, without it and everything depending upon education, the child is an empty gourd, into which the parent and teacher may pour what they will. It is true that we cannot remodel baby's features by hanging up pictures of Venus or busts of Hermes before its blinking eyes. It is impossible to transform the small, uplifted nose of baby girl—a feature which an uneducated person would describe as a gift transmitted directly from her papa's mamma—into a model of that of the Capitoline goddess. But, with our enlarged opportunities and our wider culture, we can make the mind and spirit of son and daughter what we will. Not only are our own props—Uncle Jacob's temper, Aunt Caroline's selfishness—knocked from under us, and the responsibility put on the proper persons, but that greater weight of wet clay, represented by our heirs and heiressess, is dumped down in our back yard, and we are told to work our will on it.

But if we would make him "beautiful" and "happy" (I believe those are the modern terms for the old-fashioned "good" and "lovable"), we must not suggest to his groping intelligence anything unpleasant, fearful, exciting. The result of this sort of treatment is at your service, should you require proofs. The modern baby must not be crossed, and it may get its way by wrinkling up its little forehead in sign of displeasure, or it may push its parent away with its little hand. By these signs (so I read in a book, and my respect for literature leads me to believe it), a child of one week's experience in the world will show that the care it has received has not been the most intelligent, or the intention regarding it the most elevated. In fact, it is remarkable how soon the perfectly innocent and sinless beings catch on to present conditions. An infant of a few days will have scented out the doctrine that neither his ancestors nor original sin is responsible for his behaviour, but his system of education; with the result that I have seen a whole family thrown into a state of nervous prostration, from a sense of unfulfilled duty toward him. For if these long-famous scapegoats are not to blame for him, are not his associates?

And then the new process is such a troublesome one. "Now I lay me," which has been the comfort of every child since its composition, has been remodelled, because it contains the suggestion, "If I

should die before I wake." It must be said that the late edition is unpoetical, and more, it does not give the child the sense of security with which he used to shut his eyes in the dark, and know that whatever happened, he, the small egoist, was safe. And then, for the steps are too numerous and fatiguing to be described here, the mother must supervise every toy, book, picture that comes into the nursery. Bringing up a family on health food and boiled water is play in comparison; for it is to be noted that, as long as people admitted the existence of original sin, many of its consequences entertained children, and even taught them to entertain themselves. Now they may not have a whip, or a Jack in the box, or even a Noah's ark, because the first suggests cruelty, the second fear, the third a flood—which I suppose is to be avoided as exciting controversy. They cannot be wild Indians or give warwhoops; for the primeval savage was a ferocious, painted thing, and far from our present ideal of elegant simplicity. All fairy tales are tabooed as untrue or containing uncomplimentary references to stepmothers; though why the real mother of a child should be expected to protect the reputation of her successful rival is one of the niceties of what people call ethical religion which an old-fashioned person finds it hard to accept. These fables, and others containing genii, dwarfs, the cutting off of heads, and the consequences of swallowing fish-bones, have their uses, says the

Parents' Review with supernatural gravity: "Justice can be extracted from them, but not justice with mercy."

And when the children leave their exhausted parents for half a day and go to school, the pictures on the walls of that building are subjected to the severest scrutiny. Jane and I have no reason to complain of this law, because of a confiscated "Daughter of Herodias," by Mantegna: the murderess sweeping along with majestic mien, the maid behind, holding her ghastly burden swathed in cloths, hangs on our drawing-room walls, the Scriptural history not being considered by the school-board an offset to the bad example. But one quite pities the imaginative child who is told to look at landscapes in which lambs are frisking, and made to read moral tales about machinery, instead of the inspiring deeds of Mr. Great-Heart and the Castle of Despair.

And further: under the new system in which original sin has no place, the parent undergoes a good deal of vicarious suffering. A friend of mine tells me that when her boy—who, to speak without ceremony, is a greedy little creature—overtaxes his digestion, she goes on strict diet for a week. The child has not sinned: he is by nature sinless; it is from herself that he has gotten the *idea* of over-feeding. Another, when the pure heart of her boy

is excited, and he strikes his little sister, undergoes penance, and allows the cook to be impertinent. I suppose that it is a comfort to allow one's cook to be impertinent and not answer back, and at the same time know that one is incited from a high motive to accept the indignity. When Jane and I keep silent, it is with a loss of self-respect, but we are driven to submission from a dislike to doing our own work.

I need not, however, pile on the difficulties of being a parent under present conditions. And, for once, husband and wife are agreed. No more can he taunt her, when the children misbehave, with "It is the woman, not I," nor can she refer to that well-known strain of cowardice and sheltering behind petticoats—to speak with poetical freedom of the fashions of the Garden. In thinking over this, one is almost willing to take off one's bonnet and give up the search for original sin, letting it stay lost, when one realises that these clods of earth can no longer with propriety be thrown.

I would like to live a hundred years, and one of my reasons for desiring longevity is that I want to see the full effects of the present system of education. Mr. Spencer says that we must wait till we rid ourselves of our superstitions; but that the sense of moral obligation is transitory, and will diminish as soon as the sense of moralisation increases. In expectation of this interesting period,

a faint-hearted person with a full nursery would best, however, in our opinion, provide herself with a small bundle of twigs; and so, after all, in the cause of these degenerates, I will put on my bonnet, and go out to look for original sin.

XXX

Defunct Sins

IN the first place, insincerity is dead. In the theological school in which two people I knew were matured it was thought that everybody, once in a lifetime, might tell one large, necessary falsehood, but they could only have one; people were warned to be very saving of it and not to waste it on any trifling matter. But a person could be too economical. In fact, Jane and I knew a lady, a very silent, thrifty woman, who, we have reason to believe, kept her falsehood against the rainy day, until suddenly and without opportunity to use it, she died. I cite this example, because it is right to warn you that even in a matter like this you may be over-parsimonious. At one time I remember that when I wanted to praise a friend, and recommended her as "a rather dry person, but perfectly sincere," those present acquiesced to the remark as they would have assented had I professed a passion for the writing of Madame de Staël—that is, with a sort of icy sunshineness, by which it would be difficult to warm one's hands. In our new catechism, however, I have

come to realise that fibbing is not only wrong, but a condescension, and that truth is the defiant way by which people intimate that they do not care to please.

Now, I have been warned that I will make myself unpopular if I defend insincerity, and I do not intend to bring opprobrium upon myself, but I admit that living in the house with a very truthful person is calculated to wean one from rigid integrity of speech. For instance, there is Jane's brother James. His sentences are as devoid of ornament as a marble urn. His scrupulousness is carried even to politics, and he is afraid of saying too much, even before Jane and myself, who have no fixed principles and only know that genteel people in our part of the world vote for old General Stacy.

"I have not made up my mind," he says, when an idle person asks if he is going down town, as if his mind were a feather-bed and required turning. For her part, Jane tells me she has ceased to make any engagements in his presence, lest he constrain her to keep them with his reproachful "Did I not hear you promise?" As for the writer of this chronicle, he has almost made a truthful woman of her, at least in his presence, for when she makes, for the peace of the household, the smallest dereliction from fact—such as "Do take some *new* asparagus!" when the vegetable is canned, or, to give authority to an unpopular piece of advice, prefaces with "I read

in *Lecky* yesterday——” a sentiment that emanated from her own active brain—she shrinks abashed from his questioning, serious gaze. James is, in fact, the sort of truth-teller who is prejudicial to truthfulness, and living with him has made me think it unwise to abolish the rules of society that were made for its protection. In order to spare the feelings of our fellow-beings, we should take the pains to learn by heart certain phrases to use when we would oil the rusty wheels. For instance, you should have at your fingers’ end, “Is it possible?” and “Justly so,” “I am sure it can well be imagined,” “How thoughtful!” “Fancy!” “Quite so,” and a solemn “Very true!” And I can tell you from experience that the dullest narration ever poured into human ears can be listened to without a blur on the armour of truth, if after it the listener has only presence of mind to sigh—“Could we only put ourselves in the places of others——” The most tiresome guest that ever came and never willed to leave can be spirited over the threshold with a solicitous “Must you go?” and Jane has heard her blood relation accused of being a kleptomaniac by one with whom she thinks it policy to agree, and escaped with all her banners flying under the potent—“Fancy!” I have a friend who tells me that she received with the bomb-proof “Thus we see——” the intelligence that her brother-in-law, an inventive genius, who has discovered a religion of his own,

which he attends on Friday evenings with his hat on, to show his freedom from superstition, was seen to hand around the hat at a continental Church of England service last summer, his object being to ingratiate himself with an Anglican countess. And on another occasion, when told by the mother of seven plain daughters that the eldest had just rejected her eighth offer of marriage, Jane was all there with: "I am sure I can well understand it."

And if there is a phrase you can use in all weather, it is "Quite so," although English friends tell me that "I know what you mean," presses it hard in utility. Of course one must not put these ejaculations in one's vest pocket and take out what comes first on top. Janet, with a touching confidence in a repertoire furnished by her mamma, said "Is it possible?" when a poet informed her that his ode to "Myself" had been accepted in the *Atlantic* magazine. And when a youthful mamma, who is always being taken for her daughter's sister, and being embarrassed by people's asking "What young man were you at the theatre with last night?"—turned the battery of her eyes upon him and said, "Would you take that great fellow for my son?"—then James, also secure in his mother's recipes, whipped out "Quite so." But these disasters are the result of overweaning belief in the maternal mind. I can tell you that phrases bind the

lacerated vanity, if used with discretion, and take us long leaps over dusty places.

Another extinct sin is eating and drinking. Now I do not approve of gluttony, but I like people to enjoy what is put before them. Alas for an old-fashioned idea of hospitality! We were at a supper party the other night where terrapin was the *plat d'honneur*. But all the tall, broad-shouldered young men shook their heads. The dish was offered to a rosy youth—"No, a bit seedy, stomach rowing me." The time was when that boy would have drank corrosive sublimate rather than allude to his digestion before that girl in pink who sat beside him. Another, quite as stalwart, made his supper of cold beef, without condiments. "All right now," he was good enough to tell us, "but the doctor thinks cold beef good for general tone." After these confessions of the most agreeable young men, the girls were not ashamed to admit to the most painful forms of disease, and with that lack of reserve which is an expression of the most exquisite refinement of thought, withheld nothing that rheumatism might not do to one, or that dyspepsia could not bring about. Finally, it would have been difficult to find anything in the menu that was not too bright and good for human nature's daily food.

That freedom from reserve—I ought to praise it. And yet I am not always comfortable when it is practised. In old-fashioned novels people were on

the brink of suicide because one of these passion-tossed souls could not speak the "little word" which would explain all. Women faded and died from being married to still, silent men who loved them to distraction, but could only show it by scowling at them or refusing to speak for days at a time.

Do you not recollect a terrible tale called "Misunderstood," where a child was a victim to this choking "dryness"? Well, I had an example the other night of the opposite of reserve, and an indisputable proof of what frankness will inspire people to do. The lady who sat next me reminded me of old times by the unquestioning way in which she ate her soft crabs, but I own to a little shudder when she said: "When one has very poor things to eat at home, one does so enjoy going out where one can get this sort of thing."

Dear! dear! I thought of the Miss Tams, who have lived in our county ever since '65 on thirty-seven dollars a year, and how, when invited to partake of our homely viands, they draw up their heads and produce the appearance of having just dined on canvas-back ducks, and therefore reject roast beef as plebeian food.

And then the lady with whom I looked over the photographs in the drawing-room, turned her clear eyes upon me and demanded—"Have you heard that my eldest brother has married a 'Busy Now' girl? The one at Adams' Express with the

blondine locks." Now, in this speech there was none of that uncandour which was the rotting log 'neath the social structure under which Jane and I first saw life, but for myself, I regret that decayed state of society. I prefer the time when such a piece of information would have been communicated to me in a darkened room, the family of the brother in their watteau wrappers, the mother lying down, and all kept alive with cups of hot bouillon, while those most able to do so retailed each circumstance. And I should have liked to do my part, and in order to cheer the humiliated recall other *mésalliances*, making the hair of young persons present stand on end, while I mentioned the fact that the mamma of the indolent and exclusive Mrs. F—— had, at one period of her checkered career, sold cakes in the street, barefooted. I speak for one only, but I like better, in a word, the time when gossip was brought under a shawl at nightfall, and uncovered in the upstairs sitting-room, with doors locked, and vows of secrecy.

Another defunct sin is pretending to like what you do not like and whom you do not like, and I myself agree with public opinion in doing away with this last insincerity. This, you remember, was the mistake Antonio made when he tried to be just, and it was what irritated Tasso when Leonora said: "Yet oft with respect he speaks of thee." The woman imagined that, did she repeat some civility

spoken by a man her lover did not like, she would make peace between them. Not so; "Even that disturbs me," said Tasso; "that seeming praise from him, 'tis actual blame." And we are apt to forget that the person whom we dislike heartily dislikes us, and that, while a great deal of love is wasted in this world, very little liking is. The animosity that my acquaintance excites in me I excite in him, and all either of us asks is, not to become friends, but to be let alone. People entertain antipathies for each other, but they are never one-sided. I have yet to hear a rattlesnake make an admiring remark about a lady, and indeed if we knew a mouse's opinion of her, I am afraid that there would be wounded sensibilities.

About the other matter pretending to like what you do not like—there are words for and words against. Jane knew a lady, before the extinction of what we used to call politeness, who swallowed a little apple in which a small member of the reptilian species had taken up winter quarters. She feared that her refusal of the viand might cause mortification to her hostess. I myself have eaten not only one, but two saucers of ice cream, briny as the deep itself, in order to make the mind of my entertainer doubly sure that her dessert was in a perfect and enticing condition. But under the new régime, where "silly reserve" is done away with, and beautiful truth spoken in its purity, I have had a member of the British aristoc-

racy allude to my tea as "quite, quite nasty," and my mallard ducks were recommended as "not so nasty as they look."

But there are affectations that I can see die without a tear in my sympathetic orbs. For instance, in our day, pious people used to speak of money as "filthy lucre." I have heard a good man called "that worshipper of Mammon." In these times we have come to a much truer estimate of money. The people who have the most of it care for it the least. Poor people are generally patient without it, and not even in the pulpit is it abused. Our own pastor's compliments to our great man, who is "blessed with this world's goods," are almost fulsome, and as to what he has promised him in a better world—if I were our great man, I should write them down in my notebook and keep him to them, when I was in need of them.

Another defunct sin is characteristic of a past age. This is coquetry in any form. In those prehistoric times when girls dressed in white tarletan, with a few natural flowers in their hair, when they sang "The Last Rose of Summer," by ear, and went to church Sunday nights with young men, an engagement was a very romantic, mysterious affair. In the far South, there are still people alive who recall instances of a respectable young woman being engaged to marry more than one young gentleman at a time. But coquetry, in the unsophisticated age, was

a mask to hide real feeling. On the eve of her wedding with a bridegroom she didn't mind pretending she cared for, since it was only pretense, she accepted young Lochinvar, whom modesty had compelled her to feign to despise.

Being engaged was the most exciting period of a man's life. Not the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask was a profounder secret. People no more dared refer to her betrothal to an engaged girl, than they dared to ask her whether she was wearing last summer's hat. The position of the fiancé to this difficult person was that of Dives to Lazarus—between them a great gulf was fixed, the lady, in the character of the saint, throwing over to him unsubstantial civilities. Some men never got over calling their wives "Miss Sally" or "Cousin Lou," so long was the period of probation, and so stern the etiquette enforced. A delicately-minded female, when her trousseau was really ready, and her bridesmaids asked, has been known to admit that she had some idea of getting married, but even to her maiden imagination she was never quite willing to own to whom. And when the final words were spoken, and the distracting creature really his, the captor breathed a long breath of gratified ambition.

One summer, up in the New Hampshire hills, where wooded heights climb deep and steep into the blue sky and the breeze blows strong over the long, low fields,—where purple shadows lie all day long on

undulating slopes, and a brown brook rushes beneath intertwining elms, a certain couple was, notwithstanding all Nature's allurements, her successful rival in our interest. Up to eight o'clock one Saturday night, there were still hopeful people who were willing to risk their spare change on his getting away. He was little and red and had a small, weak chin; but he thought much of himself, and was precious of his health and clothes. The girl was half a dozen years older, big, had "fundamental ideas," walked ten miles before breakfast, and wore a scuff hat and short skirt. Her skin was leather-coloured, but, as it was her ambition to have it so, I don't see why we were as sorry for her as we were. . . To the most casual glance, she was the stronger force, but there was a single, compromising word which, after all, must be said by him. Would he say it? During his six weeks in the mountains that young man had learned much. He had been brought face to face with a blank wall, his pursuer behind him. Would he throw up his arms? . . One afternoon he broke the bonds of close and inevitable companionship, and went out in the rain. Alas, he had not reckoned upon the indifference to weather of a girl who wears her hat off her forehead, and is clad in an abbreviated waterproof corduroy. When they returned, the man who sat next us at table,—he was a vulgar creature and had laid a wager on the youth,—came running in as pale as death. "It's all

over with him," he spluttered; "her mother's kissing him on the piazza, and her little brother has his fishing rod and is calling him 'Willie.'"

The next morning, at breakfast, the fiancée was examining plans for "our house," cut from a current magazine, and having a confidential chat with the table maid, whose services she wished to secure in the capacity of second girl. The bridegroom, to whose stature his luck had not added a cubit, had left the gay and irresponsible society of his fellows at the bachelors' table, and was sandwiched between his fair one and her mamma. One heard "Willie," and again "Willie," above the clatter of the knives and forks. And presently the pretty little New York girl, who had been distant, gave him the friendliest of "good-mornings," and asked him to tie her shoe. He felt for his teeth—poor soul, they were all pulled. Happiness had not "burst upon him like a rainbow incomplete," like the happiness of Browning's lover, and even that master of flattery,—self-esteem,—could not have humbugged him into thinking that the result of a few words, muttered in the teeth of the storm, had been unexpected or doubtful.

Now, we think that it is as natural for a nice girl to tell fibs about her engagement as it is for her to look in the glass to see if her hat is on straight, and it is as hard to own that she is in love as to tell exactly who made her winter suit. There was a time

when they walked together, hand in hand, down Love Lane in the cool twilight; not even the little birds in the green hedge knew their secret; but they saw it, shining in each other's eyes. The mystery, the suspense, the delayed hope, even the sharp pang of doubt—the doubt of self—were there. And they have come back to many of us across the years, a bitter-sweet fragrance, blowing, perhaps, over the fields of asphodel. Would you, instead, turn on the electric light and open doors and windows? Madam, I admit that you have buried the light fair thing Coquetry, but Sentiment mourns at her grave.

I don't suppose an honourable person would have done it, but, devoured with curiosity to see how young people really do act toward each other nowadays, Jane and I one afternoon got behind a curtain and listened to a conversation between one of Janet's college friends and a young man who was calling on her. . . . There they sat, looking at each other with calm directness. On his part was a sort of chill seriousness, not uncivil, but guarded as though he had in his mind the mortifying statistics of the State of Massachusetts, where there is a preponderance, similar to that in Scripture, of seven females to one male. . . . We really heard very little of their talk because, with a scrupulousness every woman will understand, having deliberately placed ourselves in temptation, Jane and I put our fingers in our ears—well, in one ear—and heard what we could not help

hearing; but we did gather that his sentences began with "Providence permitting," while she, with beautiful unreserve, discussed what one could safely eat in hot weather. . . . Once a reference was made to Byron, which woke up Jane's slumbering conscience and made her suspect that something would now be said that it would strain her sensitive honour to listen to. She made a movement to relinquish our perilous joy. But the young man, like Barnes Newcome, evidently "thought small potatoes of the poetry of the affections." What he said of the author of "Childe Harold" was not of a sentimental nature. He simply complained that Byron conveyed little information, and that the topography of the classic was unreliable. . . . We would have been pleased had nature finally triumphed over education, and had these young people, who were really congenial, talked nonsense and dreamed dreams. But the clock struck, and the young man, timed by his unswerving repeater, shook hands with the nice little boy in pink silk and chiffon, and went off to keep an appointment with himself.

"I wonder that we do as well as we do," said Jane grimly; "girls do get married nowadays. We got invitations to a wedding six months ago."

Is it in the power of a sensitive person to attend one more funeral? In the Middle Ages people were as proud of their bloodthirstiness, their license, their unrestraint, as we now are ashamed of these qual-

ities. Contrasting the amiability of the present with the frankness and outspokenness of the past, I do not see why we should not give ourselves airs innumerable over our fathers and mothers. Few well-bred people nowadays indulge in personalities. It is not only considered ill-natured, but bad form, to ridicule the peculiarities of our acquaintances, and an honourable being would never say, in the absence of a friend, what she would not eagerly declaim in her presence.

“In old times,” says Mr. Andrew Lang, who lives a good deal in the past, “poaching was poaching, even when performed from the purest and most soulful motives, and it unluckily led to those rather vulgar and distressing chronicles that fill the police records.” But in the world of to-day a veil of the purest, the opaquest white is laid over the faults of our acquaintances. We either ignore them or we gently shroud them. We talk about environment. The other day I heard Jane, at the sacrifice of patriotism, excusing, on the score of climate, a coloured person who had yielded to the dictates of passion and inflicted a mortal blow upon the forehead of her incompetent and provoking husband. “You cannot expect as much self-restraint in a native of Virginia as in a native of Maine,” Jane explained.

In old times, people had patience with children. Now we “respect them” and listen to their prattlings as if they were the rather incoherent mutter-

ings of an imprisoned god. "Youth must be served," says the decadent poet. Well, it always has been served, but *we* called it spoiling, and apolo-gised with the fatuous remark that deceived nobody: "That child is not well."

I suppose that it is a sort of self-indulgence to look back on the time from which we have emerged, and that it is tempting the return of vices to revert to them mentally. But for once, I shall review that period when people spoke their minds.

In those haunting days, did Letitia coquet, or was Ann of a fluid imagination, we discussed these foibles around a tea table where, to be frank, her absence gave us freedom. Did dear Clarissa perform in secret what the Japanese ladies do in public, and use her face as the artist uses a white wall,—that is, as a surface to decorate,—we talked about her between sips of tea, deplored her vanity, and were young persons present, as a moral lesson, we added ten years to her age. Were we guests together at a country house, and were the B——'s unaware of that distinguishing family trait that set the D——'s above their kind, we warned them that it were better to wear all their small jewels. I am sure that nobody thought the worse of the D—— family for the idiosyncrasy which compelled them to appropriate little valuables that, speaking strictly, were not their own, but we did not mind putting strangers on their guard. Had a schoolfellow, from humble

beginnings, wiggled her way into prominence, we did not, from high-mindedness, refrain from remarking to others who, not sharing her social triumphs, were in a mood receptive to hear it—that we knew Sally Chase in the days when she, so to speak, gave lessons on the melodeon.

Not that we were without a sense of the proprieties. Timid people took precautionary measures with Providence, and, to avert the evil consequences of sins against charity, prefaced a bit of gossip with—"You will be sorry to hear——" But it would not be frank did I add that sorrow went hand-in-hand with incredulity. It was not displeasing to good people to admit the existence of failings in others. . . . And if universal whitewashing was not exactly our employment, at least we did not excuse ourselves with the well-sounding "I love people, I am so intensely interested in my kind that I must dissect them. I am indeed a student of human nature and pull my friends to pieces as a botanist separates a flower." No, we called things by their names. We shrieked what we would not now whisper behind closed doors. There was a sort of gossip going about, but I am inclined to think that free speech was a safety-valve, for we were passionately sympathetic, even to the next-door neighbour, whose very name it is our glory now not to know; and in time of distress we flooded the stranger at our gates with help and comfort.

Now it is conceded that criticism is dead, but are we really kinder than we used to be? Is this apologetic attitude toward all crimes, all opinions, the result of prudence or indifference, or of a heightened morality? Society was certainly a censor of morals, and people were in wholesome fear of trial at her terrible tribunal. She was a dreadful figure—the old lady in the stiff black silk and lace cap. She knew the details of our private lives, and laid them bare. She did not define sin as an illness or crime or as the result of underfeeding. She never called yesterday to-morrow. But she made us behave.

You, of course, know what people mean when they say—of hopelessly incompatible natures—“The wider the divergence the greater the unity.” But this mystic phrase would have been received by the censor in the black silk with a stiff “Nonsense!”

And for a word of private opinion. Now and then when Jane and I have been out to dinner, and have been fed on mental chicken and rice, while the characters of our friends were served up boiled in syrup and tenderly sprinkled with confectioner's sugar, and—well, we have yawned and sighed for vinegar and spice. “Perfection is unloved,” says the philosopher, “in this imperfect world, where for imperfection there is instant sympathy.”

To be sure, if you really cannot be perfectly amiable at all times, there is a remedy. If you sincerely disapprove of the person who uses safety-pins to

attach her children's dresses in the back, being too lazy to sew on buttons; if you think it your duty to warn your fellow human beings against the character of one who does not pay her dressmaker, and if you would yet escape a suit for damages, why, I take pleasure in presenting you with an effective means of disparaging these ladies among your common acquaintances. Speak of their cleverness, their good manners, their erudition, their fine complexion, the way their heads are set on their shoulders. The more highly you extol them the more willing your audience will be to accept with credulity anything you may have to say against these ladies. At any moment—after this—you may slip into the cask the drop of wild dew which will ferment the whole mass of honey. A woman of average capacity can praise another woman out of the patience of her best friend.

In reading over this list of defunct sins, I note with the hypersensitiveness of the age the slightest possible *soupeçon* of acerbity. I seem to regret that these evils no longer exist, but I do myself injustice. I am really glad that they are dead, but, as a mother becomes attached to her mentally inferior child, I am simply trying to help octogenarians adjust themselves to living without them.

OCT 1 1903

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Sept. 2009

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN COLLECTIONS PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 015 863 922 1